ORTHODOX CALENDAR AND LECTIONARY

2023

This document contains the orthodox calendar (life of the saints, feasts of the day) together with lectionary (scripture daily readings, sermon for Sunday gospel) for the whole year. The material is based on the rules of the eastern orthodox church on the new calendar. The reference for old and new testament text is taken from Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America and EOB (Eastern /Greek Orthodox Bible) based on Septuagint and the patriarchal text. This text is not meant for liturgical use. There can be differences between the local lectionary and this document (sometimes when the feast of the local parish is celebrated the fasting rules can be different).

In some of autocephalous Eastern Orthodox churches the order of Sunday Gospel readings are a litlle different than for others (e.g. 21 Sunday after Pentecost can come before 20 Sunday after Pentecost). For this document, information from many sources was used, I apologize for not asking permission to use that. I was worried that it may take a lot of time until all sources will agree upon the content and this will delay too much the creation of this compilation. However, for more info, I indicated the sources used for this compilation at the end of this document

But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. Matthew 6.3-4

This document is shared for free and there are no financial advantages from making this document. The only reason to make this compilation was to have one source were daily gospel readings, the life of the saints for that day together with an icon can be found to educate ourselves following the word of God.

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, and it is they that bear witness to Me. John 5:39

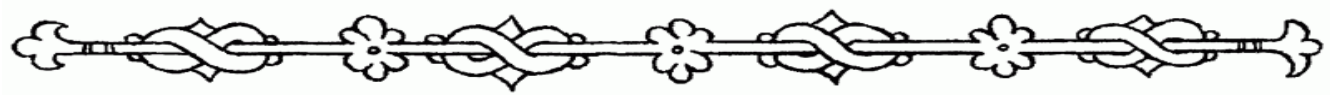
Here, we presented only some known saints, for more extensive list please consult local Synaxarion. Please support local orthodox churches, orthodox communities and not only with donations, or other things they need:

so that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you. May they be one in us, . John 17:21

If you find this book useful, please mention in your prayer also the people who wrote/gathered this material.

Thank you and please forgive unwanted mistakes.

"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on us"



Most important feasts for this year

2023

Circumcision of Christ: 1 January

Epiphany, Baptism of Christ: 6 January

Presentation of Jesus at the Temple: 2 February

Annunciation: 25 March

Entry into Jerusalem, Palm Sunday: 09-Apr-2023

Resurrection of Jesus, Pascha, Easter: 16-Apr-2023

Ascension of Christ: 25-May-2023

Pentecost (50 days after Easter): 04-Jun-2023

Nativity of St. John the Baptist: 24 June

Feast of Saints Peter and Paul: 29 June

Transfiguration_of_Jesus: 6 August

Dormition of the Theotokos: 15 August

Beheading of St John the Baptist: 29 August

Nativity of the Theotokos: 8 September

Exaltation of the Cross: 14 September

Intercession of the Theotokos: 1 October

Presentation of the Theotokos: 21 November

Nativity of Christ: 25 December

Day 01-Jan-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Circumcision of Our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ

On the eighth day following His birth, the Divine Child was presented in the Temple and circumcised according to the Law existing in Israel since the time of Abraham. On this occasion He was given the name Jesus, which the Archangel Gabriel had announced to the Most-holy Virgin Mary. The Old Testament circumcision was the prefiguring of the New Testament baptism. The circumcision of our Lord shows that He truly received upon Himself the body of man and not just seemingly, as was later taught of Him by heretics. Our Lord was also circumcised because He wanted to fulfill the entire Law, which He Himself gave through the prophets and forefathers. In fulfilling the written Law, He replaced it with baptism in His Holy Church, as was proclaimed by the Apostle Paul: *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature* (Galatians 6:15). (In the liturgical calendar of the Church, this Feast of the Lord's Circumcision has neither a forefeast nor an afterfeast.)

Source: St. Nikolai Velimirovic, The Prologue of Ohrid – Volume One.

Apolytikion

Our human form hast Thou taken on Thyself without change, O greatly-compassionate Master, though being God by nature; fulfilling the Law, Thou willingly receivest circumcision in the flesh, that Thou mightest end the shadow and roll away the veil of our sinful passions. Glory be to Thy goodness unto us. Glory be to Thy compassion. Glory, O Word, to Thine inexpressible condescension.

Kontakion

Now the Lord of all that is doth undergo circumcision, in His goodness cutting off the sins and failings of mortals. He this day doth give salvation unto the whole

world; and the hierarch and bright daystar of the Creator now rejoiceth in the highest, Basil the wise and divine initiate of Christ.

Saint Basil the Great, Archbishop of Caesarea

Basil was born during the reign of Emperor Constantine. While still unbaptized, he spent fifteen years in Athens, where he studied philosophy, rhetoric, astronomy and all the other secular sciences of that time. His colleagues there were Gregory the Theologian and Julian, later the apostate emperor. In his mature years he was baptized in the Jordan River along with Ebulios, his former teacher. He was Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia for almost ten years and completed his earthly life fifty years after his birth. He was a great defender of Orthodoxy, a great light of moral purity, a religious zealot, a great theological mind, and a great builder and pillar of the Church of God. Basil fully deserved the title 'Great.' In liturgical services he is referred to as the 'bee of the Church of Christ, which brings honey to the faithful and with its stinger pricks the heretics.' Numerous works of this Father of the Church are preserved; they include theological, apologetical, ascetical and canonical writings, as well as the Holy and Divine Liturgy named after him. This Divine Liturgy is celebrated ten times during the year: on the first of January, his feast day; on the eve of the Nativity of our Lord; on the eve of the Theophany of our Lord; on all Sundays of Great Lent except Palm Sunday; on Great and Holy Thursday; and on Great and Holy Saturday. St. Basil reposed peacefully on January 1, 379, and entered into the Kingdom of Christ.

Source: St. Nikolai Velimirovic, The Prologue of Ohrid – Volume One.

<u>Apolytikion</u>

Your voice resounded throughout the world that received your word by which, in godly manner, you taught dogma, clarified the nature of beings, and set in order the character of people. Venerable father, Royal Priesthood, intercede to Christ God to grant us great mercy.

<u>Kontakion</u>

For the Church art thou in truth a firm foundation, granting an inviolate lordship unto all mortal men and sealing it with what thou hast taught, O righteous Basil,

revealer of heavenly things.

St Gregory, Bishop of Nazianzus (374), father of St Gregory the Theologian

He converted to Christianity from paganism as an adult through the influence of his pious wife St Nonna (Aug. 5). He was made Bishop of Nazianzus in Cappadocia in 329, and served faithfully for forty-five years, defending his flock against the inroads of Arianism and the persecutions of Julian the Apostate. Late in life, he ordained his son Gregory, later known as St Gregory the Theologian (Jan. 25) to assist him. He reposed in peace, aged almost 100.

Peter the New Martyr of the Peloponnesos; Theodotos the Martyr; Righteous Theodosios of Triglia; Emmelia, Mother of Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, Makrina, and Peter of Sebaste; Telemachos the Martyr; Fulgentius, Bishop of Ruspe,Melania the Younger, Nun of Rome; The Martyr and Presbyter Zoticus of Rome, Patron of Orphans

Day 01-Jan-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Sunday before Epiphany
2 Timothy 4:5-8; Mark 1:1-8
5 As for you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of one who proclaims the Good News and fulfil your ministry.
Paul announces his end His loneliness 6 As for me, I am already being offered in sacrifice, and the time of my release has come.
7 I have fought the good fight! I have finished the course! I have kept the faith! 8 From now on, the crown of righteousness is reserved for me, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all those who have loved his appearing.

Gospel Reading: Sunday before Epiphany

1 The beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
2 As it is written in the prophets: Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.
The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
'Make ready the way of the Lord! Make his paths straight!' 4 John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.
5 All the country of Judea and all those from Jerusalem went out to him.
They were baptized by John in the Jordan river, confessing their sins.
6 John was clothed with camel's hair, a leather belt around his waist, and he ate

locusts and wild honey.
7 He preached, saying, 'He who comes after me is more powerful than I, and I am not worthy to kneel down and untie the strap of his sandals.
8 I baptized you using water, but he will baptize you in the Holy Spirit.

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING

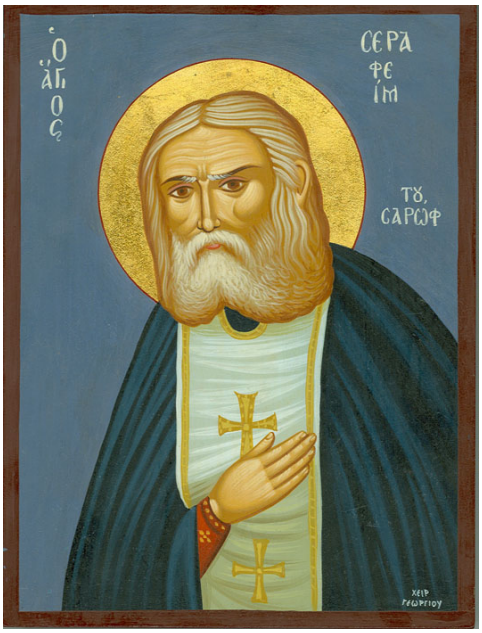
We are still within the orbit of the central midwinter celebration of the Nativity, which is a real testing ground of our Orthodoxy.
The world prepares for Christmas immediately after the beginning of November. Its festivity and celebration is emotional, material and ephemeral.
Everyone who works for even a modest company, will feel the moral pressure to attend an office party, a Christmas lunch, or other event celebrating Christmas long before the day of the Feast, while the Church is fasting and preparing body and soul for its first celebration of the appearance of God in the world of men, born of His Virgin Mother in the city of His ancestor in the flesh King David, in Bethlehem.
However, after Christmas Day itself, the world changes from a lazy and sentimental bonhomie, to a frenzy of shopping and bargain hunting, while the Church continues the celebration of the Feast with no fasting until the Vigil of Theophany, where we are today.
Where was my heart in the whirlwind of activity before and after Christmas? Did I keep the Fast? Did I give glory and thanks to God on any day after Christmas Day? Did I praise and pray in thankfulness to His Mother, who consented freely to bear the Son of the Father in Heaven, eternally begotten without any mother, now born a little child from her womb, of a conception without seed by the action of the Holy Spirit, in Nazareth nine months before? The Church's Liturgical calendar forms and structures the yearly round of our Christian life, because the Calendar recalls and mirrors the working of the Eternal God now, in our time.
My conscious attention to this, reveals the working of God's Grace in me, insofar as the truth of salvation has become a guiding principle in my life as a unique person, created by God, called by Him to be a member of His Mystical Body, the Church which He founded on the Apostles, and of which He is the Head.
Today's Gospel passage is the very beginning of the Gospel according to St Mark, when the salvation of men by God begins to be announced by John the Baptist.
The way to it is not seen in the ordinary business of men, in the life of the cities, of the world.
It is announced by a voice crying in the wilderness, where the world has no place. It is where the Lord God is to be found passing through, and the way He is going should be made straight and smooth and welcoming.
My own crookedness from bending to fit the demands of the world have to be straightened by radical repentance, and by confession and cleansing of my sins.
Then I will truly rejoice with the Church, at the appearing of Our God, Father, Son,

and Holy Spirit; when Jesus, in entering the water of Baptism, sanctifies it, and makes it truly, cleansing, saving, and Life-Giving for each one of us.
Amen.
Archim. Awraamy Neyman

Day 02-Jan-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Beginning of the Forefeast of Theophany
† St Seraphim of Sarov (1833)



"Saint Seraphim was born in the town of Kursk in 1759. From tender childhood he was under the protection of the most holy Mother of God, who, when he was nine years old, appeared to him in a vision, and through her icon of Kursk, healed him from a grave sickness from which he had not been expected to recover. At the age of nineteen he entered the monastery of Sarov, where he amazed all with his obedience, his lofty asceticism, and his great humility. In 1780 the Saint was stricken with a sickness which he manfully endured for three years, until our Lady the Theotokos healed him, appearing to him with the Apostles Peter and John. He was tonsured a monk in 1786, being named for the holy Hieromartyr Seraphim, Bishop of Phanarion (Dec. 4), and was ordained deacon a year later. In his unquenchable love for God, he continually added labours to labours, increasing in virtue and prayer with titan strides. Once, during the Divine Liturgy of Holy and Great Thursday he was counted worthy of a vision of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who appeared encompassed by the heavenly hosts. After this dread vision, he gave himself over to greater labours.

"In 1794, Saint Seraphim took up the solitary life in a cell in the forest. This period of extreme asceticism lasted some fifteen years, until 1810. It was at this time that he took upon himself one of the greatest feats of his life. Assailed with despondency and a storm of contrary thoughts raised by the enemy of our salvation, the Saint passed a thousand nights on a rock, continuing in prayer until God gave him complete victory over the enemy. On another occasion, he was assaulted by robbers, who broke his chest and his head with their blows, leaving him almost dead. Here again, he began to recover after an appearance of the most Holy Theotokos, who came to him with the Apostles Peter and John, and pointing to Saint Seraphim, uttered these awesome words, 'This is one of my kind.'

"In 1810, at the age of fifty, weakened by his more than human struggles, Saint Seraphim returned to the monastery for the third part of his ascetical

labours, in which he lived as a recluse, until 1825. For the first five years of his reclusion, he spoke to no one at all, and little is known of this period. After five years, he began receiving visitors little by little, giving counsel and consolation to ailing souls. In 1825, the most holy Theotokos appeared to the Saint and revealed to him that it was pleasing to God that he fully end his reclusion; from this time the number of people who came to see him grew daily. It was also at the command of the holy Virgin that he undertook the spiritual direction of the Diveyevo Convent. He healed bodily ailments, foretold things to come, brought hardened sinners to repentance, and saw clearly the secrets of the heart of those who came to him. Through his utter humility and childlike simplicity, his unrivalled ascetical travails, and his angel-like love for God, he ascended to the holiness and greatness of the ancient God-bearing Fathers and became, like Anthony for Egypt, the physician for the whole Russian land. In all, the most holy Theotokos appeared to him twelve times in his life. The last was on Annunciation, 1831, to announce to him that he would soon enter into his rest. She appeared to him accompanied by twelve virgins martyrs and monastic saints with Saint John the Baptist and Saint John the Theologian. With a body ailing and broken from innumerable hardships, and an unspotted soul shining with the light of Heaven, the Saint lived less than two years after this, falling asleep in peace on January 2, 1833, chanting Paschal hymns. On the night of his repose, the righteous Philaret of the Glinsk Hermitage beheld his soul ascending to Heaven in light. Because of the universal testimony to the singular holiness of his life, and the seas of miracles that he performed both in life and after death, his veneration quickly spread beyond the boundaries of the Russian Empire to every corner of the earth. See also July 19." (Great Horologion)

July 19 is the commemoration of the uncovering of St Seraphim's holy relics, which was attended by Tsar Nicholas II.

Saint Seraphim's life became a perpetual celebration of Pascha: in his later years he dressed in a white garment, greeted everyone, regardless of the season, with "Christ is Risen!" and chanted the Pascha service every day of the year.

St Sylvester, Pope of Rome (335)

He was a native of Rome. Because of his virtue and love for all, the faithful made him Pope against his will upon the death of Pope Miltiades in 314. He was Pope when Constantine the Great ended the persecution of the Church, and personally instructed the Emperor in the Faith. Unable to attend the Council of Nicaea personally, he sent delegates to represent him and uphold the Orthodox faith there. He reposed in peace in 325.

Once, in a debate between the Saint and Zambrius, a Jewish scribe and occultist, Zambrius whispered a magic word in the ear of a bull, upon which the animal fell down dead. Zambrius then challenged the Pope to do as much in the name of Christ. The holy bishop replied, 'My God gives life and

resurrection, not death.' Lifting his hands to heaven, he restored the creature to life. The Emperor and the crowd who witnessed the debate cheered the Saint, and many decided to be baptized.

Venerable Juliana of Lazarevskoye (1604)

The daughter of a devout and generous official in the Tsar's court, she was orphaned at the age of six and reared by relatives. At the age of sixteen she was given in marriage to George Ossorguin, a nobleman who lived on an estate at Lavarevskoye, near Murom.

The couple were a model of Christian marriage. When her husband was at home, they would devote much of their time to praying together. When he was away in service to the Tsar, she would devote whole nights to prayer and handiwork. Since she was not free to give away her fortune as she desired, she earned money for almsgiving by the work of her hands, something unheard-of for a lady of her rank. When anyone died in the village she prayed for him at length, and if he were indigent she would pay for his funeral.

When two of the pious couple's sons died, Juliana asked her husband to let her enter a monastery. He refused because they had other young children who needed her care; but he gave her permission to live a monastic life under his roof. From this time forward, she increased her fasts, spent her nights in prayer, and slept on the floor. When her husband died ten years later, her wealth was at her own disposal, and she devoted all of it to works of mercy. When her family criticized her for depriving herself so harshly, especially for her severe fasting, she answered 'Whatever my body loses now won't be food for worms later. What is the point of fattening the flesh only to lose the soul?'

From 1601 to 1603, Russia was struck for three years by the worst famine in its history, so severe that men ate human flesh in their desperation. Saint Juliana sold all her livestock, gave away all the provisions in her barns, and freed all her serfs who wished to leave. Those who remained became her family, with whom she shared all she had. By her prayers, bitter and inedible plants became palatable so that they could be made into bread. The holy woman, despite almost killing privation, never complained, but seemed more cheerful than ever before.

Saint Juliana reposed in peace at the age of seventy in 1604. At the moment of her death a bright halo was seen above her head. Ten years later her body was found incorrupt, and her tomb filled with a fragrant myrrh. She was venerated among the Russian people from that time forward, though it was not until 1988 that she was officially glorified by the Moscow Patriarchate.

Holy New Martyr George the Georgian (1770)

A native of Georgia, he was sold as a slave to a Turk and made a Muslim in his youth. He lived a long life as a Muslim, seemingly having no memory of the faith or language of his parents. Without warning, however, when he had reached the age of seventy, his conscience awakened, he presented himself to the judge and stated that he had been born a Christian and wished to die a

Christian. The old man remained immovable under questioning, exhortation, threats and, finally, torture; he would only say 'I am a Christian; I want to die a Christian!' The executioners hanged him, then cut him down to see if this last trial would change his mind. When he assured them once again that he was a Christian, they hanged him again, and he was allowed to claim his martyrdom.

Saint Cosmas, Archbishop of Constantinople

Saint Theodota, Mother of the brothers Cosmas and Damian

Venerable Ammon of the Tabennisiot Monastery in Upper Egypt

Day 02-Jan-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Hebrews 5:4-10 John 3:1-15
Epistle Reading: St.
Paul’s Letter to the Hebrews 5:4-10 BRETHREN, one does not take the honor upon himself, but he is called by God, just as Aaron was.
So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, 'Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee'; as he says also in another place, 'Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek.
In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear.
Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

Gospel Reading: John 3:1-15 At that time, there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nikodemos, a ruler of the Jews.
This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him.
Jesus answered him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God.
Nikodemos said to him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?' Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.
That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.
Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.
’ The Spirit blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, and you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.
Nikodemos said to him, 'How can this be?' Jesus answered him, 'Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand this? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen; but you do not receive our testimony.
If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended

from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven.
And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

Day 03-Jan-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Holy Prophet Malachi

Chronologically, Malachi was the last of the prophets. He was born after the return of the Hebrews from the Babylonian Captivity in 538 B.C. He was unusually handsome in countenance. According to tradition, the people called him an angel, perhaps because of his external beauty or because of his spiritual purity, or even perhaps because of his association with an angel of God. On many occasions he spoke face to face with an angel. When this occurred, others heard the angel's voice, but they were not worthy to see the face of the angel. The young Malachi prophesied that which the angel proclaimed. He cried out against ungrateful Israel and against the lawless priests. Five hundred years before Christ, Malachi clearly prophesied the coming and the mission of John the Baptist (Malachi 3:1). But he is chiefly the prophet of the day of the Dread Judgment. He reposed in the Lord while still young. Following him, there were no more prophets in Israel until John the Baptist.

Source: St. Nikolai Velimirovic, The Prologue of Ohrid – Volume One.

Apolytikion

As we celebrate the memory of Thy Prophet Malachi, O Lord, through him we beseech Thee to save our souls.

Holy Martyr Gordius of Caesarea (4th c.)

> "The Martyr Gordius, who was from Caesarea of Cappadocia, was a centurion by rank. Unable to bear the impiety of the heathen, he withdrew to the wilderness to purify himself through prayer and fasting. After he perceived that his ascetical training had prepared him sufficiently, he came down from the mountains when a certain pagan festival was held in Caesarea, attended by all, and presented himself to the multitude. Although the spectacles of the festival continued, no one paid them any heed, but all eyes were turned upon him. From his sojourn in the mountains, his look was wild, his beard was long, his raiment squalid, his body like a skeleton; yet a certain grace shone round about him. He was recognized, and a loud shout and tumult was made, as his fellow Christians rejoiced, and the enemies of the truth cried out for his death. He boldly professed his faith before the Governor, and after torments was beheaded, in the reign of Licinius in the year 314. Saint Basil the Great

delivered a homily on Saint Gordius, mentioning that some of those in his audience had been present at the Saint's martyrdom." (Great Horologion)

Our Holy Mother Genevieve of Paris (~502)

She was born near Paris to a family of wealthy landowners. When she was about ten years old St Germanus of Auxerre (July 31), passing through the region on his way to Britain, discerned a special divine purpose for her, and told her parents that she had been chosen for the salvation of many. "He asked her that day, and early the next, if she would consecrate herself to holy virginity for Christ and, on both occasions, she answered that it was her dearest wish. Then he blessed her and gave her a copper coin inscribed with the Cross to wear around her neck, telling her never to wear gold, silver or pearls, but to elevate her mind above the small beauties of this world in order to inherit eternal and heavenly adornments." (Synaxarion)

Convents were unknown at that time in Gaul, so Genevieve lived as a solitary, in a cell in her own house, first with her parents then, after their death, with her godmother in Paris. She devoted herself to the poor, giving away everything that came into her hands, except the small amount that she needed to feed herself on bread and beans. (When she passed the age of fifty, she was commanded by the bishops to add some fish and milk to her diet). She kept Lent from Theophany to Pascha, during which time she never left her house. She was never afraid to rebuke the powerful for their oppression of the weak and the poor, and thus earned many powerful enemies; but the people's love for her, and the support of the Church, kept her from persecution.

It became her custom to walk to church on Sundays in procession with her household and many pious laypeople. Once the candle borne at the front of the procession (it was still dark) blew out in a rainstorm. The Saint asked for the candle and, when she took it in her hand, it re-lit and stayed lighted until they reached the church. At several other times, candles lit spontaneously in her hand; for this reason her icon shows her holding a candle.

She traveled throughout Gaul (modern-day France) on church business, being greeted with all the honors usually accorded a bishop. Several times she saved the city of Paris from the assaults of barbarian tribes through her prayers, by pleading with barbarian chieftains, and once by organizing a convoy to bring grain to the besieged city.

Saint Genevieve reposed in peace at the age of eighty. Through the centuries since then, she has shown her holy protection of the city of Paris countless times, and her relics in the Church of Saint Genevieve have wrought innumerable healings. Her relics were many times carried in huge processions in times of war, pestilence or other national trial. These relics were mostly burned and thrown into the River Seine by the godless Revolutionaries in 1793, but, as the Synaxarion concludes, "those who continue to invoke Saint Genevieve with faith, find her to be well and truly alive."

Righteous Peter of Atroas; Righteous Akakios the Wonderworker; Righteous Thomais of Lesbos

Day 03-Jan-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free
Readings of the day: Timothy 3:13-16; 4:1-5

Epistle Reading: St. Paul's First Letter to Timothy 3:13-16; 4:1-5

TIMOTHY, my son, those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.
I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these instructions to you so that, if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth.
Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion:

God was manifested in the flesh,
justified in the Spirit,
seen by angels,
preached among the nations,
believed on in the world,
taken up in glory.

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, through the pretensions of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and enjoin abstinence from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.
For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving; for then it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 3:1-6
At that time, John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." Now John wore a garment of camel's hair, and a leather girdle around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.

Then went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

Day 04-Jan-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Synaxis of the Seventy Apostles.

In Luke 10:1, the Lord appointed seventy men to go out as missionaries - as apostles. Though not so prominent as the Twelve, the Seventy carried out their missions with fervor and enthusiasm. The Tradition of the Church confirms that the Seventy remained true to the Lord and their calling, fulfilling a vital role in the spread of the gospel. These were not random choices or accidental:volunteers but true disciples, true apostles, whose labours carried the message of their Lord throughout the Roman Empire and beyond. Though lists of the Seventy vary somewhat, all are remembered in the calendar of the Church. One day, January 4, is set aside to remember them all, and the record of their work is preserved in accounts handed down through the centuries from place to place, especially in those locations where they laboured. To tell the stories passed down in the Church concerning all of the Seventy would fill a book of considerable size, but the compromise of telling the stories of a few, both prominent and relatively obscure members, will relate the conviction and faith of this illustrious body. Barnabas, a Jew of the tribe of Levi, was born in Cyprus of wealthy parents. He is said to have studied under Gamaliel with Saul of Tarsus, who was to become Paul the Apostle. Originally named Joseph, he was called Barnabas (Son of Consolation) by the apostles (Acts 4:36) because he had a rare gift of comforting the hearts of people, He who sought out Paul when everyone else was afraid of him, bringing him to the apostles. And it was Barnabas who was first sent by the apostles to Antioch to find out what was going on there (Acts 11:22). Barnabas sought out Paul to work with him, and their long association was broken only when Barnabas was determined to take his cousin Mark, whom Paul did not trust just then, on a missionary journey. The mutual relationships among the three were later healed (Col, 4:10). Many ancient accounts say Barnabas was the first to preach in Rome and the first in Milan, but he was martyred in Cyprus, then buried by Mark at the western gate of the city of Salamis. Among the more prominent of the Seventy was the Apostle Titus, whom Paul called his. brother (2 Cor. 12:18) and his son (Titus 1:4). Born Crete, Titus was educated in Greek philosophy, but after reading the Prophet Isaiah he began to doubt the value of all he had been taught. Hearing the news of the coming of Jesus Christ, he joined some others from Crete who went to Jerusalem to see for themselves. After hearing Jesus speak and seeing His works, the young Titus joined those who followed. Baptised by the Apostle Paul, he

worked with and served the great apostle to the Gentiles, traveling with him until Paul sent him to Crete, making him bishop of that city. It is said that he was in Rome at the time of the beheading of St. Paul and that he buried the body of his spiritual father before returning home. Back in Crete, he converted and baptised many people, governing the Church on that island until he entered into rest at the age of ninety-four. There are many less prominent among the Seventy who also laboured for Christ unto death, Aristarchus, whom Paul mentions several times (cf. Acts 19:29; Col. 4:10; Philem. 24), calling him a "fellow labourer", became bishop of Apamea in Syria. Sosthenes (Acts 18:17; 1 Cor. 1:1) became bishop of Caesarea, and Tychicus (Acts 20:4; Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7; 2 Tim. 4:12; Titus 3:12) succeeded him in that city. Simeon (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3), son of Cleopas (who was the brother of Joseph the betrothed of the Virgin Mary), succeeded James as bishop of Jerusalem. Aristobulus (Rom. 16:10), the brother of the Apostle Barnabas, preached the Gospel in Britain and died peacefully there. The lives of these few are quite representative of the Seventy who were instrumental in helping to plant the Church throughout the world. Many became bishops, but the names of all are numbered in heaven.in the Book of Life, as faithful servants of the Lord, apostles and foundations of the Church.

The Ethiopian Eunuch of Queen Candace

His baptism by the holy Apostle Philip is told in Acts ch. 8. He was already seeking out the things of God — the story shows him reading the Book of Isaiah, and specifies that he was going to Jerusalem to worship. He returned home ("rejoicing", say the scriptures) and proclaimed the Gospel of Christ in his native land; the ancient Church of Ethiopia traces its beginnings to his mission. He died a martyr's death.

Venerable Apollinaria (5th c.)

She was a maiden of high rank, the daughter of a magistrate named Anthimus in the city of Rome. Filled with love for Christ, she prevailed on her parents to allow her to travel on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. In Jerusalem she dismissed most of her attendants, gave her jewels, fine clothes and money to the poor, and went on to Egypt accompanied only by two trusted servants. Near Alexandria she slipped away from them and fled to a forest, where she lived in ascesis for many years. She then made her way to Sketis, the famous desert monastic colony, and presented herself as a eunuch named Dorotheos. In this guise she was accepted as a monk.

Anthimus, having lost his elder daughter, was visited with another grief: his younger daughter was afflicted by a demon. He sent this daughter to Sketis, asking the holy fathers there to aid her by their prayers. They put her under the care of "Dorotheos", who after days of constant prayer effected the complete cure of her (unknowing) sister. When the girl got back home it was discovered that she was pregnant, and Anthimus angrily ordered that the monk who had cared for her be sent to him. He was astonished to find that

"Dorotheos" was his own daughter Apollinaria, whom he had abandoned hope of seeing again. After some days the holy woman returned to Sketis, still keeping her identity secret from her fellow-monks. Only at her death was her true story discovered.

Martyrs Euthymios and Twelve Monks of Vatopedi Monastery
Our Righteous Father Theoctistus, Abbot of Cucomo in Sicily; Forefeast of the Theophany of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; Zosimos the Monk and Athanasios the Notary; Righteous Apollinaria the Senator; Martyrs Chrysanthos and Euphemia; Righteous Euthymios the Younger; New Martyr Onuphrios; Righteous Euthymios of Vatopedi; Righteous John Scholarios; Eustathios Archbishop of Serbia; Nikephoros the Leper

Day 04-Jan-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 4:9-16; John 1:18-28

Brethren, God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong.

You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are ill-clad and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become, and are now, as the refuse of the world, the off-scouring of all things.

I do not write this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you, then, be imitators of me.

Gospel Reading: John 1:18-28

No one has ever seen God; the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.

And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' He confessed, he did not deny, but confessed, 'I am not the Christ.' And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the prophet?'

And he answered, 'No.' They said to him then, 'Who are you? let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' He said, 'I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said.'

Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, 'Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?'

John answered them, 'I baptize with water; but among you stands one whom you do not know, even he who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.' This took place in Bethany beyond the Jordon, where John was baptizing.

Day 05-Jan-2023 Thursday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Eve of Theophany
Holy Martyrs Theopemptus and Theonas (~290)

Theopemptus was a bishop (some say in Nicomedia) who contested for Christ during the fierce persecutions of the Emperor Diocletian. For openly confessing the Faith, he was arrested and brought before the Emperor himself, whom he fearlessly convicted for his cruelty and ungodliness. The saint was then subjected to several cruel tortures, from which he miraculously emerged unhurt. He was given a deadly poison to drink, prepared by a sorcerer named Theonas. When Theonas saw that the holy bishop was unharmed by his potion, he was led to confess Christ. Finally, St Theopemptus was beheaded, and Theonas thrown in a pit and buried alive.

Our Venerable Mother Syncletike (4th c.)

She was the daughter of wealthy and devout parents in Alexandria. Though much desired as a bride for her great beauty, intelligence and wealth, she showed no interest in any worldly attraction and, when her parents died, gave away all of her large fortune. She then fled with her blind sister to the desert, where she became the foundress of monastic life for women in the Egyptian desert, just as St Anthony had for men. At first she attempted to struggle in solitude, hiding her ascetic labors from all and keeping strict silence before all people. But in time her holiness became known, and a company of young women formed around her, seeking to emulate and share in her way of life. At first she kept her silence even with them, but at last was forced out of love to give way to their pleas and reveal to them the wisdom that had been implanted in her. A settled monastic community grew around her, and she became known to all as Amma, the feminine form of the title Abba.

At the age of eighty-five, she was stricken with an agonizing cancer that slowly destroyed and putrefied her body. She bore these heavy trials with patience and thanksgiving, and told her disciples: "If illness strikes us, let us

not be distressed as though physical exhaustion could prevent us from singing God's praises; for all these things are for our good and for the purification of our desires. Fasting and ascesis are enjoined on us only because of our appetites; so if illness has blunted their edge, there is no longer any need for ascetic labors. To endure illness patiently and to send up thanksgiving to God is the greatest ascesis of all."

Eventually her illness deprived her even of the power of speech, but it was said that the sight of her joyful and serene countenance amid her sufferings was better than any other teaching, and the faithful continued to flock to her to receive a blessing. After a three-month martyrdom, she departed this life, having predicted the day of her death.

It is said that St Syncletike was the virgin who sheltered St Athanasius the Great when he was driven into hiding for more than a year by the Arians. Her biography, which the Synaxarion calls "one of the basic texts of Orthodox spirituality," is attributed to St Athanasius.

Apollinaria of Egypt; Venerable Father Gregory at Akritas

Day 05-Jan-2023 Thursday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 9:19-27 Luke 3:1-18
Epistle Reading: St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians 9:19-27 BRETHREN, though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more.
To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law – though not being myself under the law – that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law – not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ – that I might win those outside the law.
To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize?
So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Well, I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air; but I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

Gospel Reading: Luke 3:1-18 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene,
in the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness; and he went into all the region about the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.
Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'
He said therefore to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits that befit repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father"; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore

that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.' And the multitudes asked him, 'What then shall we do?' And he answered them, 'He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise.'
Tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, 'Teacher, what shall we do?' And he said to them,
'Collect no more than is appointed you.'
Soldiers also asked him, 'And we, what shall we do?' And he said to them, 'Rob no one by violence or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.' As the people were in expectation, and all men questioned in their hearts concerning John, whether perhaps he were the Christ, John answered them all,
'I baptize you with water; but he who is mightier than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into his granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.'
So, with many other exhortations, he preached good news to the people.

Day 06-Jan-2023 Friday

Fast free

The Holy Theophany of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ

Epistle Reading: St. Paul's Letter to Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7
TITUS, my son, the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of the great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.
But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 3:13-17

At that time, Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on him; and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.'

> 'About the beginning of our Lord's thirtieth year, John the Forerunner, who was some six months older than our Saviour according to the flesh, and had lived in the wilderness since his childhood, received a command from God and came into the parts of the Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance unto the remission of sins. Then our Saviour also came from Galilee to the Jordan,

and sought and received baptism though He was the Master and John was but a servant. Whereupon, there came to pass those marvellous deeds, great and beyond nature: the Heavens were opened, the Spirit descended in the form of a dove upon Him that was being baptized, and the voice was heard from the Heavens bearing witness that this was the beloved Son of God, now baptized as a man (Matt. 3:13 17; Mark 1:9 11; Luke 3:1 22). From these events the Divinity of the Lord Jesus Chist and the great mystery of the Trinity were demonstrated. It is also from this that the present feast is called "Theophany," that is, the divine manifestation, God's appearance among men. On this venerable day the sacred mystery of Christian baptism was inaugurated; henceforth also began the saving preaching of the Kingdom of Heaven.' (Great Horologion)

When Thou was baptized in the Jordan, O Lord, the worship of the Trinity was made manifest; for the voice of the Father bare witness to Thee, calling Thee His beloved Son. And the Spirit in the form of a dove confirmed the certainty of the word. O Christ our God, Who hast appeared and hast enlightened the world, glory be to Thee. — Troparion of Theophany

'But Christ's descent into the river has also a further significance. When Christ went down into the waters, not only did he carry us down with Him and make us clean, but He also made clean the nature of the waters themselves... The feast of Theophany has thus a cosmic aspect. The fall of the angelic orders, and after it the fall of man, involved the whole universe. All God's creation was thereby warped and disfigured: to use the symbolism of the liturgical texts, the waters were made a "lair of dragons". Christ came on earth to redeem not only man but through man the entire material creation. When He entered the water, besides effecting by anticipation our rebirth in the font, he likewise effected the cleansing of the waters, their transfiguration into an organ of healing and grace.' Bishop Kallistos, "Background and meaning of the Feasts" in the Festal Menaion.

The western feast of Epiphany, also on this day, commemorates not Christ's baptism but the adoration of the Magi.

Day 06-Jan-2023 Friday

Fast free
Readings of the day: None
Today the Apostle and Gospel of the feast are used

Day 07-Jan-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

The Synaxis of the Venerable and Illustrious Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist of the Lord, John.

Because John's main role in his life was played out on the day of the , the Church has from earliest times dedicated the day following Theophany to his memory. An incident with the hand of the Forerunner is also linked to this feast. The Evangelist Luke desired to remove the body of John from Sebaste, where the great prophet was beheaded by Herod, to Antioch, his place of birth. He succeeded, though, in acquiring and translating only one hand, which was preserved in Antioch until the tenth century. After this it was transferred to Constantinople, whence it disappeared during the time of the Turks.

Feasts of St. John are celebrated several times throughout the year. Among the Gospel personalities who surround the Savior, John the Baptist occupies a totally unique place by the manner of his entry into the world, and by the manner of his life in this world; by his role in baptizing people for repentance; by his baptizing the Messiah; and, finally, by his tragic departure from this life. He was of such moral purity that, in truth, he could be called an angel — as Holy Scripture calls him — rather than a mortal man. St. John especially differs from all other prophets in that he had the privilege of being able, with his hand, to show the world Him about Whom he prophesied.

It is said that every year on the feast of the saint, the bishop brought the hand of St. John before the people. Sometimes the hand appeared open and other times the hand appeared clenched. In the first case it signified a fruitful and bountiful year, and in the second case it meant a year of unfruitfulness and famine.

Source: St. Nikolai Velimirovic, The Prologue of Ohrid – Volume One.

Apolytikion

The memory of the just is celebrated with hymns of praise, but the Lord's testimony is sufficient for thee, O Forerunner; for thou hast proved to be truly even more venerable than the Prophets, since thou was granted to baptize in the running waters Him Whom they proclaimed. Wherefore, having contested for the truth, thou didst rejoice to announce the good tidings even to those in Hades: that God hath appeared in the flesh, taking away the sin of the world and granting us great mercy.

Kontakion

The Jordan accepted Your presence in the flesh and reversed its course in fear. John, fulfilling the spiritual ministry, fell back in awe. The ranks of Angels, seeing You in the flesh, baptized in the river, were amazed, and all who were in darkness were filled with light, praising You who appeared and enlightened all.

New Martyr Athanasius of Attalia (1700)

A native of Attalia, he lived in Smyrna. Once he unguardedly spoke the opening words of the Muslim confession of faith, "There is no god but God." Hearing this, some Turks immediately surrounded him and took him to the court, claiming that he had embraced Islam. This he vehemently denied, assuring them that he was a Christian and that the words he had spoken would be unremarkable to any Christian. He was thrown into prison as an apostate and, after a sham trial, beheaded. His body was thrown to the dogs, but the usually voracious animals refused to touch his body, and it was removed by some pious Christians and given honorable burial.

Our Venerable Father Cedd, Bishop of Essex and Abbot of Lastingham (664)

He and his brother Chad (Mar. 2) were from an English family, educated under Saint Aidan (Aug. 31) of Lindisfarne. Both brothers entered monastic life at Lindisfarne and later became bishops. Cedd travelled as an evangelist among the people of Essex, where Saint Finan (Feb. 17) consecrated him to be their first bishop. He founded two monasteries in Essex, one of whose churches still stands; he built yet another monastery at Lastingham in Yorkshire, where he lived until his repose. He spoke both Irish and Anglo-Saxon, and served as a translator for the Irish at the Synod of Whitby in 664. He reposed at Lastingham not long after the Synod.

Day 07-Jan-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Ephesians 6:10-17; Matthew 4:1-11

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord, with the strength of his power. 11 Put on the complete armor of God, so that you may be able to resist the devil's tactics.
12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the principalities, powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness and against the evil spiritual forces of the supernatural realms.
13 Therefore, put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to resist when the evil day comes. Having accomplished all things, may you stand your ground! 14 Yes, stand [firm], having the belt of truth around your waist, having put on the breastplate of righteousness,
15 having fitted shoes on your feet so as to be ready in the Good News of peace.
16 Above all, take up the shield of faith which will enable you to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one. 17 Take also the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit which is what God has said.

Gospel Reading:

Matthew 4:1-11 At that time, Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And he fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was hungry.
And the tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' But he answered, 'It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." Then the devil took him to the holy city, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,
"He will give his angels charge of you," and "On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone." Jesus said to him, 'Again, it is written,
"You shall not tempt the Lord your God.
" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Be gone, Satan! for it is written,
"You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve." Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and ministered to him.

Day 08-Jan-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Our Venerable Mother Domnica (Domnina) (~474)

She was born in Rome and reared in the love of Christ. She secretly left her parents' house and traveled by ship to Alexandria, where she found lodging with four virtuous pagan maidens. By her example and counsel these four were in time led to abandon idolatry and embrace Domnica's faith. The five then sailed to Constantinople, where it is said that the Patriarch Nectarius (October 11) was notified of their coming by an angel and met them at the dock. The Patriarch baptized the four maidens himself, giving them the names Dorothea, Evanthia, Nonna and Timothea, then settled them and Domnica in a monastery.

Soon the fame of Domnica's pure life, wise teaching, and wondrous healings spread throughout the city, and even the Emperor Theodosius, with the Empress and his court, came to see her. Soon the crowds made it impossible for her and her sisters to live the heavenly life for which they had entered the monastery; so they relocated the monastery to a remote, demon-haunted location where executions had once commonly been performed, since everyone avoided the area. Here a new monastery was built by order of the Emperor, and the sisters found peace.

Saint Domnica's fame continued, and she became not only a healer but an oracle for the city of Constantinople, prophesying the death of the Emperor Theodosius and the unrest which followed it. She reposed in peace, having first entrusted the care of the monastery to Dorothea. At the moment of her death, the whole monastery was shaken, and those present saw Saint Domnica dressed as a bride, being borne heavenward escorted by a company of white-clad monks and nuns.

Saint Atticus, Patriarch of Constantinople (425)

Born in Sebaste in Armenia, he was reared by monks who held to the heresy of Macedonius, which denied the uncreated divinity of the Holy Spirit; but when he came of age he rejected this error and embraced the Orthodox faith. He settled in Constantinople and became a priest in the Great Church. Though he had little formal education, his amazing memory, his zeal for Christ, and his powerful sermons recommended him to all, and he was elected Patriarch in 406, during the reign of the Emperor Arcadius. He served as shepherd to the Church for twenty years, ruling always with wisdom and moderation. Though he was unbending in upholding the Faith exactly, he took a conciliatory, persuasive approach to heretics and schismatics; in this way he

was able to restore many to the Church rather than driving them away. His best-known single act is his restoration of the name of St John Chrysostom to the diptychs. Saint John had been unjustly denied commemoration in the Patriarchate since his exile, which had led to a schism; restoration of his commemoration not only corrected a grave injustice but healed a schism. Saint Atticus also presided over the rededication of the Agia Sophia, which had been burned in 404 in the rioting that followed St John Chrysostom's exile. He reposed in peace in 425.

Saint Severinus (482)

St. Severinus came to the borderland of present-day Gemany and Austria from the east — possibly the Egyptian desert — to care for the Roman Christians who were endangered by invading barbarians during the collapse of the Roman Empire. He remained there until the end of his life. While he was there he advised both common people and kings to put eternal life first, and taught them to be generous to one another and to lead a true Christian life. He built a monastery and protected from harm those who gathered around him. As he foretold, the monks and other Christians who had followed him escaped to saftety in Italy, taking St. Severinus' incorrupt relics with them. His relics are still honored in Frattamaggiore, Italy (near Naples).

—from the 2006 *Saint Herman Calendar*

Holy Martyrs Julian and Basilissa

Venerable George the Chozebite Saint Gregory, Bishop of Ohrid; Cyrus, Holy Patriarchs of Constantinople; Gregory of the Kiev Caves; Emilianos the Confessor, Bishop of Cyzikos; Pega the Virgin, Hermitess of Peakirk

Day 08-Jan-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Sunday after Epiphany;
Ephesians 4:7-13 Matthew 4:12-17
Epistle Reading: St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians 4:7-13 BRETHREN, grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.
Therefore it is said, 'When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.
' (in saying, 'He ascended,' what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is he who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Gospel Reading: Sunday after Epiphany; Matthew 4:12-17

At that time, when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth he went and dwelt in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: 'The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, toward the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region

and shadow of death light has dawned.
' From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING

‘ The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light...’ John the Baptist’s very existence was to point, like an arrow, towards the coming of the Saviour.
Miracles surrounded his conception, birth, upbringing and ministry; indeed, his very survival until the God-appointed time when he led the Lord down into the waters of Jordan.
His time was done, his star was setting while that of Christ was beginning its fiery ascent.
Thus it was that he became known as ‘Forerunner’ - the one who points the way.
He was ‘Forerunner’ because he forecast the power of the Holy Spirit in Christ’s ministry.
He, as he himself said, was only the messenger.
John prepared the way of the Lord, baptising all who came to him with repentance and confession, in order they might be in a condition to receive the Spirit from the Lord.
The Forerunner baptised with water yet at that moment in Jordan’s sacred stream when the Lord steps in, John realises how much greater than he is Christ, for at that world-stopping moment, the Holy Trinity is revealed in all its glory as the Holy Spirit descends upon the Saviour.
John’s ‘voice in the wilderness’ was the signal for Christ to begin his ministry in the towns and villages of Galilee, settling in Capernaum.
Why Capernaum? Except to fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah: ‘The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light,’ for many Gentiles dwelt in that region.
And what does Christ preach? Repentance! Repentance as a starting point for new life - Life in Christ.
The Forerunner had prepared this way, calling on the people to repent and be saved and had warned his hearers that the One who was to come after him would baptise with the Holy Spirit and with fire.
Christ preaches repentance with the power of the Holy Spirit, teaching, healing, and guiding through the use of parables, to reach the hearts and minds of those who sit at his feet.
He brings his hearers out of darkness to free them from the kingdom of sin and death and reveal to them the Kingdom of Light.
Time and again, we hear Christ’s words: ‘Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.
’ The Kingdom is here; it is fulfilled because Christ himself is the Kingdom, for He is the light and life of the world.
In Liturgy after liturgy we sing the words ‘We have seen the true light...’.

But to truly see the true light we must first repent and put the darkness behind us. We must remind ourselves of our own baptismal promises (made by us, or on our behalf) and that, as a result, we were now ‘illumined’ - that is, enlightened by the power of the Holy Spirit.
Repentance, enlightenment, baptism, are tied with cords stronger than steel; they cannot be separated any more than can the words of the Gospels.
We know the Gospels are true, but has this knowledge brought us to repentance, for only through repentance can we begin to walk in the light; the light of Christ.
‘Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand’ is a call to each and every one of us who is baptised to daily re-examine our lives and our priorities; to think deeply on whether we walk in the light or are still entrapped in darkness.
The Kingdom of heaven is Now - we cannot put off the moment when we may stand before Christ himself to answer for our life and works.
We ignore the light at our eternal peril.
From archives of the Archdiocese

Day 09-Jan-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Martyr Polyeuctus (~250)

Polyeuctus and Nearchus were fellow-officers and close friends, serving in the Roman army at Miletene in Armenia. Nearchus was a Christian. Polyeuctus, though abundant in virtues, was still imprisoned in idol- worship. When the Emperor Decius' persecution broke out (239-251), an edict was issued requiring all soldiers to show their loyalty by making public sacrifice to the gods. Nearchus sadly told Polyeuctus that because of the decree they would soon be parted. But Polyeuctus, who had learned about the Christian faith from his friend, answered that Christ had appeared to him in a vision, exchanging his military uniform for a shining garment and giving him a winged horse. Polyeuctus took the vision as a sign that he was to embrace the Faith, and that he, with Nearchus, would soon be lifted up to heaven. Almost immediately, he first tore down the Emperor's edict in front of a startled crowd, then smashed the idols being carried in a pagan procession. He was quickly arrested and subjected to beating and scourging for sacrilege, but he only proclaimed more forcefully that he was a Christian. When the persecutors saw that Polyeuctus' patient endurance was bringing other idolaters to the faith, they condemned him to death.

Polyeuctus walked to the place of execution with the expression of a slave walking toward freedom, calling encouragement to the Christians who accompanied him. Fearlessly extending his neck to receive the sword, he received baptism in his own blood and received the martyr's crown.

Saint Peter II, Bishop of Sebaste (4th c.)

He was the tenth and youngest child of a family of saints, the brother of St Basil the Great, St Macrina and St Gregory of Nyssa. His father died shortly after his birth in 319, and he was reared mostly by his sister St Macrina. He was ordained to the priesthood by his brother St Basil in 370, and consecrated Bishop of Sebaste at the opening of the Second Ecumenical Council (381).

Saint Peter took an active part in the Council, oversaw his flock wisely, and reposed in peace.

Venerable Eustratius the Wonderworker (9th c.)

He was born to pious parents in Tarsia in Bithynia. At the age of twenty he entered monastic life at the Monastery of Agaures near his home. There he became a model of prayer, ascesis and zeal for holiness — he possessed nothing but the cloak he wore, and did not even have his own cell, choosing instead to sleep on the bare ground. When he slept he would not lie on his back or his left side, but always on his right side. In church, he stood repeating 'Lord, have mercy!' to himself throughout the services. He was ordained to the priesthood, and in time was made abbot of the community. But just at that time, Leo the Armenian became Emperor and revived the iconoclast heresy. The monks of Agaures, who held to the Orthodox Faith, scattered to caves and forests to escape persecution. Eustratius himself was imprisoned for a time, and was only able to re-gather the community and resume its direction when Leo died and Orthodoxy was restored in 842.

As abbot, Eustratius continued to live as the humblest of the brethren, spending the day sharing in their manual labor, and most of the night in prayer and prostrations. He often traveled among the dependencies of his large monastery to offer counsel and encouragement to the brethren. While traveling he would often give his coat or even his horse to anyone in need whom he met on the way. Once he gave the monastery's only ox to a peasant who had lost his own. Once, on a visit to Constantinople, he was given a large sum of money by the Emperor for the monastery; on the way back he distributed all of it to the poor. Once, on the road, he met a man who had despaired because of his sins and was about to hang himself. The Saint took the man's hand and said 'My child, may the weight of your sins lie on me from now on. On the day of Judgment, I will answer for them instead of you. Only throw away this rope and hope in God.'

During his own life, Saint Eustratius performed countless miracles by his prayers: healing the sick, quenching fires, raising the dead. He reposed in peace in Constantinople at the age of ninety-five, having spent seventy-five years in monastic life.

Saint Philip, Metropolitan of Moscow (1569)

He was born in 1507 to a noble family, and served briefly in the royal court. At the age of thirteen he entered the Solovki Monastery on the White Sea, within the Arctic circle. Here he lived in great austerity and eventually became Abbot. Through his labors and prayers the monastery soon became a center of spirituality and culture throughout the region. His fame reached the attention of Tsar Ivan IV ("the Terrible"), who in 1566 made him Metropolitan of Moscow, much against the Abbot's desire.

Tsar Ivan revered Philip ("even as Herod had revered Saint John the Baptist," says the Great Horologion), and had been a generous benefactor of Solovki Monastery.

But no sooner was Metropolitan Philip installed than he began to reprimand the Tsar for the brutal reign that he had imposed upon the people. Despite many warnings and threats from the Tsar, the holy bishop refused to be silent in the face of massive injustice, telling Ivan that he had never sought to be Metropolitan, that he had desired only to live quietly in Solovki, but now that he was shepherd of his flock, he was unable to remain silent. "I cannot obey your command rather than God's. I stand for what is true and right and shall continue to do so, even though I be deprived of my office and suffer the worst of torments; otherwise our faith would be vain, and in vain too would be the apostolic office."

Finally the Tsar gathered various false witnesses against the Metropolitan, and called a council against him in 1568. Saint Philip was condemned and imprisoned in Moscow, but soon the Tsar, fearful of the people's love for their bishop, sent him to a monastery in Tver, where he lived confined and in great hardship.

"On December 23, 1569, a royal messenger came, asking the Metropolitan's blessing for the Tsar's expedition to Novgorod. Saint Philip told him to do that which he came to do, then raised his hands in prayer to God. The Tsar's messenger fell upon him and suffocated the holy hierarch with a pillow. In 1591 his relics were transferred to Solovki, and in 1652 to the Dormition Cathedral in Moscow; many miracles were wrought through his holy relics." (Great Horologion)

Day 09-Jan-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 9:19-27 Luke 3:1-18
Epistle Reading: St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians 9:19-27 BRETHREN, though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more.
To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law – though not being myself under the law – that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law – not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ – that I might win those outside the law.
To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize?
So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Well, I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air; but I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

Gospel Reading: Luke 3:1-18 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene,
in the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness; and he went into all the region about the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.
Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'
He said therefore to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits that befit repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father"; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore

that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.' And the multitudes asked him, 'What then shall we do?' And he answered them, 'He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise.'
Tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, 'Teacher, what shall we do?' And he said to them,
'Collect no more than is appointed you.'
Soldiers also asked him, 'And we, what shall we do?' And he said to them, 'Rob no one by violence or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.' As the people were in expectation, and all men questioned in their hearts concerning John, whether perhaps he were the Christ, John answered them all,
'I baptize you with water; but he who is mightier than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into his granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.'
So, with many other exhortations, he preached good news to the people.

Day 10-Jan-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Our Holy Father Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa (395)

"Saint Gregory, the younger brother of Basil the Great, illustrious in speech and a zealot for the Orthodox faith, was born in 331. His brother Basil was encouraged by their elder sister Macrina to prefer the service of God to a secular career (see July 19); Saint Gregory was moved in a similar way by his godly mother Emily, who, when Gregory was still a young man, implored him to attend a service in honour of the holy Forty Martyrs at her retreat at Annesi on the River Iris. Saint Gregory came at his mother's bidding, but being wearied with the journey, and feeling little zeal, he fell asleep during the service. The Forty Martyrs then appeared to him in a dream, threatening him and reproaching him for his slothfulness. After this he repented and became very diligent in the service of God. He became bishop in 372, and because of his Orthodoxy he was exiled in 374 by Valens, who was on one mind with the Arians. After Valens' death in 378 he was recalled to his throne by the Emperor Gratian. He attended the Local Council of Antioch, which sent him to visit the churches of Arabia and Palestine, which had been defiled and ravaged by Arianism. He attended the Second Ecumenical Council, which was assembled in Constantinople in 381. Having lived some sixty years and left behind many remarkable writings, he reposed about the year 395. The acts of the Seventh Ecumenical Council call him "Father of Fathers." (Great Horologion)

Our Holy Father Theophan the Recluse (1894)

This modern-day Church Father was born in Chernavsk in central Russia. The son of a priest, he entered seminary at a young age, then completed the four-year course in theology at the Academy of Kiev. Though he distinguished himself as a student, his heart turned increasingly toward the monastic life, and he was tonsured a monk and ordained a priest upon completion of his studies. During his time at the Academy he often visited the Lavra of the Caves, and there became a spiritual child of Father Parthenius (March 25).

His desire for monastic life was not fulfilled immediately, for the Church felt need of his intellectual gifts. He served as a professor at the Theological Academy in St Petersburg, then worked for seven years in the Russian

Mission to the Near East, mostly in Palestine. During this time he gained a perfect mastery of Greek and studied the works of the Church Fathers in the original languages. Returning to Russia, he was soon consecrated a bishop; but after seven years of episcopal service, he at last achieved his heart's desire, resigning as bishop and retiring to a small monastery at Yvschen, where he spent the rest of his days.

After taking full part in the liturgical and communal life of the monastery for several years, he took up the life of a recluse in 1872. He lived in two small rooms, subsisting almost entirely on bread and tea, visited only by his confessor and the abbot of the monastery. He celebrated the Divine Liturgy every day in his cell. All of his time not taken up by inner prayer was devoted to translating the works of the Fathers into Russian and, increasingly, to writings of his own. Most importantly, he prepared a Russian-language edition of the Philokalia which had a deep impact upon Russian spiritual life.

Though he received no visitors, St Theophan entered into correspondence with many earnest Christians who sought his counsel, and so in time became the spiritual father of many believers throughout Russia. He reposed in peace in 1894.

In addition to the Philokalia, St Theophan produced (among other works): a Spiritual Psalter of selections from St Ephraim the Syrian; The Path to Salvation, an exposition of Orthodox Spirituality written in clear, plain language for those living in the world; collections of his letters to spiritual children; and Unseen Warfare, a treatise on prayer and the ascetical life. This last has an unusual history. In its original form it was written by Lorenzo Scupoli, an Italian Roman Catholic priest. St Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain, recognizing the book's merit, produced a Greek edition in which he corrected various deviations from Orthodoxy in the original. St Theophan in turn revised the Greek edition extensively, removing some material and adding passages of his own; so that the Italian, Greek and Russian versions are in fact three substantially different books. Many of St Theophan's works (including Unseen Warfare) are available in good English translations. They are almost unique in presenting the undiluted hesychastic spirituality of the Orthodox Church in plain, straightforward language accessible to most people.

Saint Marcian of Constantinople, Priest and Oikonomos of the Great Church
Blessed Theosebia the Deaconess, sister of Basil the Great & Gregory of Nyssa
Saint Domitian, Bishop of Melitene
Venerable Ammon, Egyptian Ascetic

Day 10-Jan-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Hebrews 4:1-13; Luke 21:12-19

1 God's Sabbath rest Let us beware, then! Since the promise remains, let us be
careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it.
2 For we also had the Good News preached to us, just as them, but they gained
nothing from the word they heard because those who heard did not combine it with
faith.
3 However, we who have faith are entering into that rest, even as God said: As I
swore in my wrath, they will not enter into my rest.
a And yet, the works were finished from the foundation of the world.
4 Somewhere [else], God said this about the seventh day: God rested on the
seventh day from all his works.
5 And again: They will not enter into my rest.
6 It remains the case, then, that there would be some people who would enter that
rest, and those to whom the Good News was preached before failed to enter [it]
because of [their] disobedience.
7 God has thus defined a certain day, 'today,' saying through David much later, in
the words already quoted: Today if you will hear his voice, do not harden your
hearts.
8 If Joshua had given them rest, God would not have afterward spoken of another
day.
9 There must still be, then, a Sabbath rest for God's people, 10 and anyone who
has entered into his rest has also rested from his [own] works, just as God did.
11 Therefore, let us do our utmost to enter into that rest, for fear that anyone
should fall according to the same pattern of disobedience.
12 Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged
sword, piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and it
is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.
13 No creature is hidden from God's sight, but all things are naked and open
before the eyes of the one to whom we must give an account.

Gospel Reading:

12 But before all these things [happen], you will be placed under arrest and be
persecuted, you will be handed over to synagogues and prisons, brought before
kings and governors for my Name's sake.
13 It will turn out for you as an occasion to bear witness.

14 Therefore, settle it in your hearts not to ponder in advance how to answer, 15
for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to
withstand or contradict.
16 You will be handed over even by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends.
Some of you will be put to death.
17 You will be hated by all for my Name's sake, 18 yet not a hair of your head will
perish.
19 By your endurance you will acquire your lives.

Day 11-Jan-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Our Holy Father Theodosius the Cenobiarch (519)

"This Saint had Cappadocia as his homeland. He lived during the years of Leo of Thrace, who reigned from 457 to 474. The Saint established in the Holy Land a great communal monastery wherein he was the shepherd of many monks. While Saint Sabbas was the head of the hermits of Palestine, Saint Theodosius was governor of those living the cenobitic life, for which reason he is called the Cenobiarch. Together with Saint Sabbas, towards whom he cherished a deep brotherly love in Christ, he defended the whole land of Palestine from the heresy of the Monophysites, which was chanpioned by the Emperor Anastasius and might very well have triumphed in the Holy Land without the opposition of these two great monastic fathers and their zealous defence of the holy Council of Chalcedon. Having lived for 103 years, he reposed in peace." (Great Horologion)

Apolytikion

With the rivers of your tears, you have made the barren desert fertile. Through sighs of sorrow from deep within you, your labors have borne fruit a hundred-fold. By your miracles you have become a light, shining upon the world. O Theodosios, our Holy Father, pray to Christ our God, to save our souls.

Kontakion

As being planted in the courts of Christ thy Lord and God, with holy virtues thou delightfully didst blossom forth and didst multiply thy children amid the desert, who were watered with the showers of thy fervent tears, O chief shepherd of the godly sheepfold of our God. Hence we cry to thee: Rejoice, O Father Theodosios.

The Venerable Vitalis (5th c.)

He lived for many years as a monk in Palestine, then went to Alexandria to labor for the salvation of women living as prostitutes. He worked with his hands by day, keeping only a tenth of his earnings for himself. By night, he would take the rest of his earnings to the prostitutes' quarter and offer his money to one of them, on condition that she would not give herself up to sin that night, but instead stay with him, praying all night for his salvation. When he left her, he would make her promise to tell no one of this arrangement. Not surprisingly, complaints soon reached the Patriarch, St John the Merciful (November 12) about this monk who was causing scandal by his immoral life; but the Patriarch, discerning Vitalis' heart, did nothing. When St Vitalis died, a writing tablet was found near his body, on which was written: "Inhabitants of Alexandria, judge not before the time, until the coming of the Day of the Lord." Then many women who had been converted from an immoral life by the Saint came forward and told of his good deeds. The people of Alexandria honored him with a lavish funeral.

Saint Vitalis shows us in at least two ways that the wisdom of the holy is foolishness to the world: He never sought to justify himself in the eyes of the world, but on the contrary did everything he could to hide his virtues; and, for all his holiness, he counted himself more sinful than the "fallen," asking them to pray for his salvation.

Venerable Michael of Klops, Fool for Christ (1456)

In 1412, the monks of the Monastery of Klops (near Novgorod) found an unknown man, dressed as a monk, in the church, reading from the Epistles by candle-light. After the service they found him writing in one of the cells. He would not identify himself, but only repeated the questions that they asked him. They were about to eject him from the monastery, but the abbot, who was gifted with spiritual discernment, ordered that he be given a cell and allowed to remain. From that day on he lived in strict obedience and ascesis — he would eat only bread and water on Sundays, keeping a complete fast the rest of the week — but would never reveal his name or background.

In 1419 Prince Constantine Dimitrievitch, brother of Basil I, Grand Prince of Moscow, visited the monastery. During the meal, the still-unknown monk was assigned to read from the Lives of the Saints, and Prince Constantine immediately recognized him as Michael, son of his cousin Maxim, who had

disappeared without a trace many years earlier. Constantine revealed his identity to the abbot; this same Constantine later became a monk himself.

Monk Michael lived for many more years at the monastery. In later years he was granted gifts of prophecy: once, meeting a young boy in the street, he accurately predicted that the boy would become Archbishop Jonas; he foretold the deaths of princes and archbishops, and predicted, years before the fact, that Novgorod would lose its independence. He reposed in peace in 1456.

Day 11-Jan-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Hebrews 5:11-6:8; Luke 21:5-7, 10-11, 20-24
11 We have many things to say about these things but it is hard to explain because you have become slow at understanding.
12 For although by this time you should be teachers, you still need to have someone teach you [even] the basic principles of God's oracles.
You have come to need milk, and not solid food!
13 Everyone who lives on milk is not experienced in the word of righteousness; such a person is a baby.
14 But solid food is for those who are fully grown, who have trained their senses to discern good and evil.
6 Therefore, going beyond the teaching of the basic principles about Christ, let us move on to perfection! Let us not lay again a foundation of repentance from dead works, of faith toward God,
2 of the teaching of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.
3 If God allows, this is what we shall do.
4 Regarding those who were once enlightened, who tasted of the heavenly gift, became partakers of the Holy Spirit,
5 tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come,
6 but then fell away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance! They crucify the Son of God for themselves all over again and expose him to shame!
7 On the other hand, the land which has absorbed the rain that comes often upon it and thus brings forth a crop suitable for those who till it; such a land receives blessing from God.
8 Yet, if it bears thorns and thistles, it is rejected, close to being cursed; and its end is to be burned.

Gospel Reading:
5 As some were talking about the temple and how it was adorned with beautiful stonework and votive offerings, Jesus said,
6 'As for these things which you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left here [standing] on another and that will not be thrown down!' 7 Then, they asked him, 'Teacher, so when will these things take place? What is the sign that these things are about to happen?' 10 Then he said to them, 'Nation will rise

against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.
11 There will be great earthquakes, famines, and plagues in various places.
There will be fearful events and great signs from heaven.
20 But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its
desolation is at hand.
21 Then, let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains! Let those who are in
the midst of her depart! Let those who are in the countryside not enter in [the city].
22 For these are days of vengeance, so that all things which are written may be
fulfilled.
23 Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who nurse infants in those days!
For there will be great distress in the land, and wrath to this people.
24 They will fall by the edge of the sword and will be taken away as captives into
all the nations.
Jerusalem will be trampled down by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are
fulfilled.

Day 12-Jan-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Holy Martyr Tatiana (~230)

She was the daughter of a wealthy Roman consul. She became a deaconess in Rome, and was seized as a Christian during the reign of Alexander Severus. Before the tribunal she fearlessly confessed Christ and, when she was taken to the temple in an effort to force her to make sacrifice, she cast down the idols by the power of her prayer. At this, the soldiers seized her and subjected her to many indignities and tortures, finally throwing her into a raging furnace. When this did not harm her, she was thrown to the wild beasts, but they refused to harm her. At last she was beheaded and thus gained her crown.

Venerable Benedict Biscop, Abbot of Wearmouth (689-690)

He came from a noble Northumbrian family in Britain, and was tonsured a monk in 653 at Lerins in Gaul. In 669 he was made Abbot of the Monastery of Saints Peter and Paul in Canterbury. He traveled to Rome in 671 to be instructed in monastic practice according to the Rule of Saint Benedict (of Nursia). Returning to Northumbria he established two new monasteries, the first to follow St Benedict's Rule in the British Isles. He went to Rome once again in 678-679, this time bringing back the archcantor of St Peter's, who taught the monks of St Benedict's monasteries the chant and liturgical practices used in Rome.

Under the holy abbot's guidance, these monasteries became flourishing centers of Christian worship, scholarship and art. The Venerable Bede (May 26) was one of his disciples. Saint Benedict reposed in peace in 689 or 690, having greatly strengthened the Church and the Christian faith in Britain.

Holy Martyr Peter Apselamus of Palestine
Holy Martyr Mertios
Saint Elias the Wonderworker
Holy Eight Martyrs of Nicaea

Day 12-Jan-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Hebrews 7:1-6; Luke 21:28-33

7 This Melchizedek was king of Salem, priest of God Most High, who met Abraham
when he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and who blessed him.
2 Moreover, Abraham gave a tenth part of all to this Melchizedek! By the
interpretation of his name, he is, first, 'king of saving justice' and also king of
Salem, that is, 'king of peace;' 3 without father, mother or genealogy, having
neither beginning of days nor end of life.
He was made like the Son of God and remains a priest for all times.
4 Now, consider how great this man was, since even the Patriarch Abraham gave
him a tenth out from the best spoils! 5 Indeed, the sons of Levi who receive the
priestly office have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the
law, that is, of their brethren, although they too are Abraham's descendants.
6 But this man, who was not of the same descent, received tithes from Abraham
and blessed him who has the promises!

Gospel Reading:

28 But when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because
your redemption is near.
29 Then he told them a parable: 'Look at the fig tree and all the trees.
30 When they are already budding, you see it and know on your own that the
summer is already near.
31 Likewise, when you see these things happening, understand that the Kingdom
of God is near.
32 Amen, I tell you: this generation will not pass away until all [these] things are
accomplished.
33 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

Day 13-Jan-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Martyrs Hermylus and Stratonicus (315)

Hermylus was a deacon in Singidunum (modern-day Belgrade) during the reign of Licinius. When he was arrested he joyously welcomed the soldiers who came to seize him. When he confessed Christ before the magistrate, he was beaten, tormented, then thrown in jail. There he prayed to be allowed to partake in Christ's saving Passion, and heard a voice assuring him that in three days he would receive a Martyr's crown.

Stratonicus, his jailer, was a kind-hearted man and secretly a Christian, and wept to see the torments to which Hermylus was subjected. Seeing this, the soldiers began to question him; and, seeing that his hour had come, he in turn openly confessed Christ. For this he was seized, flogged and thrown into prison with his brother in Christ. The following day, both were bound, tied in a net and thrown into the Danube, where they received their divinely-promised crowns. Their bodies were washed up a few days later, recovered by Christians and buried with honor.

Our Holy Father Maximos Kavsokalybites (the Hut-burner) (1365)

A native of Lampsacus on the Hellespont, he became a monk at the age of seventeen. When his spiritual Father died, he went on pilgrimage to Constantinople, where he took up the ascesis of folly for Christ, pretending madness in order to conceal his virtues and struggles from the world. He then went to the Great Lavra of St Athanasius on Mount Athos, where he lived as a simple monk in complete obedience. One day, he was told in a dream to go to the summit of Athos to receive (like Moses) the tablets of the spiritual law. He prayed continuously atop the Holy Mountain for three days, after which the Mother of God appeared to him surrounded by angels. She gave him a miraculous loaf for his sustenance and told him to live in solitude on the wild slopes of Mount Athos. Henceforth he lived apart, barefoot in all weather. He would build himself crude shelters of branches and brush; after living in one for a short time he would burn it and move to a new place. Thus he received the name Kavsokalybites "the Hut Burner" from the other monks, who dismissed him as a madman.

Saint Gregory the Sinaite (April 6), one of the great Hesychasts, heard of St Maximos, and hurried to meet him. When they met, St Maximos put aside his usual silence at St Gregory's pleading, and they discoursed together for many hours. Saint Gregory was astonished at the wonders that God had accomplished in St Maximos, at his depth of spiritual understanding and his

eloquence. Returning to the nearby monks, he said "He is an angel and not a man!" He begged St Maximos to give up his nomadic life and his pretended madness, and to live among his fellow monks for their edification. This St Maximos did. He settled in one of his crude huts, living on bread miraculously provided from heaven and on sea-water, which was made sweet by his prayer. He received and counseled any monks who sought him out, and over the years was visited by two Emperors and by the Patriarch of Constantinople. In his last years he returned to a small cell in his Lavra, where he reposed in peace at the age of ninety- five. The monks of Mt Athos immediately venerated him as a Saint.

Our Holy Father Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers (369)

"The holy Hierarch Hilary was born of pagan parents in Gaul, and was trained in philosophy and rhetoric. At a time when paganism was still strong in Gaul, Saint Hilary understood the falsehood of polytheism, and became a Christian, and a great defender of his new Faith. About the year 350 he was ordained Bishop of Poitiers, when Arles and Milan were in the hands of the Arians and the Arian Constantius was sole Emperor. Like his contemporary Saint Athanasius, Saint Hilary's episcopate was one long struggle against the Arians. As Bishop of Poitiers, Saint Hilary foresaw the future greatness of Martin (see Nov. 12), and attached him to himself. In 355, when required to agree to the condemnation of Saint Athanasius by the Council of Milan, Hilary wrote an epistle to Constantius condemning the wrongs done by the Arians and requesting, among other things, the restoration of the Orthodox bishops, including Athanasius. For this, Hilary was banished to Asia Minor, where he wrote his greatest work, On the Trinity. Saint Hilary returned to his see in 360, where Saint Martin sought him out again. It was at this time that Saint Hilary blessed Martin to found a monastery near Poitiers, where Martin remained until being consecrated Bishop of Tours in 371. In his last years, Saint Hilary strove for the deposition of Auxentius, the Arian Bishop of Milan, but by affecting an Orthodox confession Auxentius retained his see. Saint Hilary reposed in peace about the year 368. Auxentius died in 374 and was succeeded by Saint Ambrose, who continued Saint Hilary's battle against Arianism." (Great Horologion, adapted)

Saint James, Bishop of Nisibis
Saint Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers
Saint Irenarchus of Rostov
Saint Eleazar of Anzersk

Day 13-Jan-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Hebrews 7:18-25; Luke 21:37-22:8
18 There is a cancellation of an earlier commandment on account of its weakness
and uselessness, 19 because the law made nothing perfect.
Now, there is the introduction of a better hope through which we draw near to God.
20 Moreover, our Lord was not made priest without the taking of an oath
21(although others became priests without any oath).
But with an oath, God says of him: The Lord swore and will not change his mind,
'You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.
a 22 Because of this, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.
23 Many, indeed, were made priests [in the past] because they are prevented from
continuing in office when they die.
24 But because he lives forever, Jesus holds a perpetual priesthood.
25 Therefore, he is also able to save to the very end those who draw near to God
through him, because he lives forever to make intercession for them.

Gospel Reading

37 Every day, Jesus was teaching in the temple, and every evening, he would go
out and spend the night on the mountain that is called Olive.
38 Then early in the morning, all the people came to him in the temple in order to
listen to him.
22 The plot against Jesus Now, the feast of unleavened bread, which is called the
Passover, was approaching.
2The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to do away with Jesus by
killing him, but they feared the people.
3 Then Satan entered into Judas, called Iscariot, who was numbered with the
Twelve.
4 So Judas went and talked with the chief priests and officers of the guard about
how he might deliver him to them.
5 They rejoiced and agreed to give him money.
6 Judas agreed and began to look for an opportunity to deliver him to them when
there would be no crowd.
7 Then, the day of unleavened bread came, on which the Passover must be
sacrificed.
8 So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, 'Go and prepare the Passover for us, that
we may eat [the Passover meal].

Day 14-Jan-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Leavetaking of Theophany

Saint Nina, Equal to the Apostles and Enlightener of Georgia (335)

She is called "Nino" in many accounts. This holy maiden was a Cappadocian, the only daughter of Zabullon, a kinsman of the Great Martyr George. She was captured and enslaved by the Iberians (later called the Georgians) and taken away to their homeland. In captivity, she lived a sober and pious life, devoting every free moment day and night to prayer. Her exceptional virtue attracted the attention of many, especially those hungry for Truth, and she simply and boldly proclaimed the Gospel to all who inquired of her.

Once she healed a woman's sick child by her prayers, and the report of this wonder reached the Queen of Georgia, who was herself suffering from an incurable disease. She asked the slave to come to her, but Nina refused out of humility, so the Queen had her servants take her to Nina's dwelling. The Saint prayed and the Queen was healed instantly. Returning home in joy, the Queen praised Nina and her faith to the King, whose name was Mirian. The king payed her little heed, but later, while hunting, he was suddenly engulfed by a dark cloud, so that he lost his way and was stricken by fear. Remembering his wife's report, he prayed "to the god whom Nina worships," and vowed that if he were delivered he would worship Him alone. Immediately the cloud vanished and the King received the light of faith. Hastening home, he found Nina and, King though he was, cast himself at the feet of the slave and told her that he had resolved that he and his whole nation should be baptized. He sent emissaries to Constantine the Great, who quickly dispatched bishops and priests to the barbarian kingdom.

When the conversion of the country was well under way, Nina, though now freed, determined to stay in Georgia, where she withdrew to the wilderness and prayed fervently that the people would be confirmed in the Faith of Christ. Saint Nina reposed in peace, surrounded by the King, his court and the clergy. Thus did a powerless slave woman, by the power of God, convert an entire nation.

Our Holy Father Sava (Sabbas), Enlightener and first Archbishop of Serbia (1236)

This best-loved Saint of the Serbian people was born in 1169, the son of Stephen Nemanja, Grand Prince of Serbia. He was named Rastko by his parents. At the age of fifteen he was appointed governor of the province of Herzegovina, but worldly power was of no interest to him, and he began to wish to give himself more fully to God. He secretly left home and traveled to

Mount Athos, where he became a novice at the Monastery of St Panteleimon. His father learned where he had gone and sent soldiers to bring him back, but before the soldiers could claim him, he was tonsured a monk with the name of Sabbas (Sava), after St Sabbas the Sanctified (December 5).

In time, under the influence of his son, Stephen Nemanja abdicated his kingship, and in 1196 he became a monk under the name of Symeon, traveling to the Holy Mountain to join his son. Symeon was quite old, and unable to endure all the ascetic labors of long-time monks, so his son redoubled his own ascetical struggle, telling his father, "I am your ascesis." The two monks together founded the Chilander Monastery, which became the center of Serbian piety and culture. Saint Symeon reposed in 1200, and his body soon began to exude a miracle-working myrrh; thus he is commemorated as St Symeon the Myrrh-streaming (February 13).

Saint Sava retired to a hermit's life in a cell on the Holy Mountain, but was compelled to return to the world: his two brothers were at war with one another, causing much bloodshed in Serbia. The Saint returned home with his father's holy relics, mediated between his brothers, and persuaded them to make peace with one another over their father's tomb, restoring peace the Serbian land. At the pleas of the people, St Sava remained in Serbia thereafter. He persuaded the Emperor and the Patriarch of Constantinople to grant autocephaly to the Church in Serbia. Against his will, he was ordained first Archbishop of his land in 1219. He labored tirelessly to establish the Orthodox Faith, for, though his father had been a Christian, many of the people were still pagan. In old age he resigned the episcopal throne and went on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. While returning from his pilgrimage, he fell asleep in peace in 1236.

The Holy Fathers slain at Sinai and Raithu (4th – 5th c.)

The Holy Fathers at Mount Sinai lived in the wilderness around the holy mountain before the Emperor Justinian built the famous Monastery there in 527. The brethren were attacked by a band of Saracen barbarians who massacred Doulas, the superior of the community, and most of the other monks. They only stopped when a pillar of fire rose to the sky from the summit of Sinai, causing them to flee in fear.

The Forty-three Holy Fathers at Raithu were massacred on December 22, but are commemorated together with the fathers of Sinai. They lived the monastic life on the shores of the Red Sea. One day about three hundred

Ethiopian barbarians raided the area, killing many Christians and enslaving their wives and children. They attacked the church at Raithu, where forty-three fathers had taken shelter. Their abbot Paul enjoined them to persist in prayer to the end, putting no stock in the passing life of this world, which they had renounced when they came to the desert. No sooner had he finished his prayer than the barbarians broke in, slaughtering all the monks but one, who escaped to bring news of the attack to Mt Sinai. When the barbarians returned to their ships they found that the Christians had run their vessels onto the rocks. Enraged, they killed all their prisoners. They themselves were massacred by a band of armed Christians who arrived soon afterward.

Saint Theodoulos of Sinai

Martyr Agnes

Day 14-Jan-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Ephesians 2:11-13; Luke 13:18-29

11 Therefore, remember that you, the Gentiles in the flesh who are called 'uncircumcision' by what is called 'circumcision' (in the flesh, made by hands); 12 remember, I say, that you used to be separated from Christ.
You were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world.
13 But now, in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ.

Gospel Reading:

18 Jesus said, 'What is the Kingdom of God like? To what shall I compare it? 19 It is like a grain of mustard seed which someone picked up and planted in his own garden.
It grew and became a large tree, and the birds of the air found shelter in its branches.
20 Again he said, 'To what shall I compare the Kingdom of God? 21It is like yeast, which a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, until it was all leavened.
22 Jesus was on his way through cities and villages, teaching and traveling onward to Jerusalem.
23 Someone asked him, 'Lord, are those who are saved [only] a few?' Jesus replied, 24 'Do your utmost to enter in by the narrow door! For I tell you that many will try to enter, but they will not be able.
25 Once the master of the house has risen up and shut the door, you will stand outside and knock on the door, saying: 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' But then, he will answer, 'I do not know you or where you come from!' 26 Then you will start saying, 'We ate and drank in your company and you taught in our streets!' 27 But the master will reply, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from! Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity.
28 In that place, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God, and yourselves being thrown outside.
29 People will come from the east, west, north, and south, and they will have a place in the Kingdom of God.

Day 15-Jan-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Our Holy Father Paul of Thebes (342)

He was born in Egypt in the reign of the Emperor Decius. Though his parents left him a large inheritance, he abandoned it and fled into the desert around the year 250 to escape the bloody persecution of Christians raging at that time. After walking for several days, he found an isolated cave with a large palm tree and a spring of fresh water nearby. Settling here in solitude, he gave himself up to constant prayer.

Many years passed. Saint Anthony the Great, having reached the age of ninety (in about the year 342) was tempted by the thought that no one else had ever lived a life so dedicated to God as his. That night, he was told in a dream that there was another hermit in the desert more perfect than himself, who had reached the age of 113 years. Anthony rose, took up his staff, and walked straight into the desert, trusting God to lead him where he should go. He was threatened by various beasts sent by the Devil, but he tamed them with the sign of the Cross, and they showed him the way he should go. Finally a wolf brought him to St Paul's cave. They embraced as brothers in Christ and spent the night in prayer. The next day Paul confided to Anthony that he was about to die, and that God had brought Anthony thence to give him honorable burial. As he had said, St Paul reposed the next day and, with many tears, St Anthony buried him in a cloak given him by St Athanasius the Great, assisted by two lions who dug out the grave with their paws.

Apolytikion

With the rivers of your tears, you have made the barren desert fertile. Through sighs of sorrow from deep within you, your labors have borne fruit a hundred-

fold. By your miracles you have become a light, shining upon the world. O Paul, our Holy Father, pray to Christ our God, to save our souls.

Kontakion

O ye faithful, let us all laud the divine Paul, the bright luminary that shone at the virtues' lofty height; and let us joyously cry aloud: O Christ, Thou art the rejoicing of all the Saints.

Our Holy Father John Kalyvites (the hut-dweller) (~450)

He was the son of Eutropius, a prominent senator, and Theodora, who lived in Constantinople. At the age of twelve, he secretly fled his home, taking nothing but a Gospel book with him. Entering the Monastery of the Unsleeping Ones in the City, he gave himself up with fervor to a life of prayer, self-denial and obedience. For three years he ate only on Sundays after taking communion, and became so thin and haggard that he bore no resemblance to the young nobleman who had entered the monastery.

Tormented by longing to see his parents, but unwilling to give up the ascetic struggle, he left the monastery with his Abbot's blessing, dressed in beggar's rags, and took up residence in a poor hut near the gate of his parents' house. Here he lived, mocked by those who had once been his servants and despised by his own parents, who no longer recognized him.

After three years, Christ appeared to him and told him that his end was drawing near, and that in three days angels would come to take him home. John sent a message to his parents, asking them to visit his hut. In perplexity, they came, and John, showing them the Gospel book that they had given him as a child, revealed to them that he was their son, and that he was about to die. They embraced him, rejoicing at their reunion but weeping for his departure from this life. Immediately, he gave back his soul to God.

The whole City of Constantinople was stirred by the story, and great crowds came to John's burial service. A church was later built on the site of his hut, and many miracles were wrought there through the Saint's prayers.

Apolytikion

Since thou hadst with fervour longed after the Lord from thy youth, thou leftest the world with its delights and nobly didst strive in valiant ascetic deeds. Thou didst pitch thy hut before the gates of thy parents; thou didst break the demons' snares, O all-blessed Father. And therefore, as is meet, hath Christ God glorified thee, O John.

Kontakion

Since thou didst desire a poverty like unto Christ's, O wise Father John, thou didst forsake thy parents' wealth; and while holding in thy hands the most holy Gospel, O righteous one, thou didst follow after Christ God while ceaselessly praying to Him for us all.

Saint Ita of Kileedy, Ireland (570)

The gentle and motherly St. Ita was descended from the high kings of Tara. From her youth she loved God ardently and shone with the radiance of a soul that loves virtue. Because of her purity of heart she was able to hear the voice of God and communicate it to others. Despite her father's opposition she embraced the monastic life in her youth. In obedience to the revelation of an angel she went to the people of Ui Conaill in the southwestern part of Ireland. While she was there, the foundation of a convent was laid. It soon grew into a monastic school for the education of boys, quickly becoming known for its high level of learning and moral purity. The most famous of her many students was St. Brendan of Clonfert (May 16). She went to the other world in great holiness to dwell forever with the risen Lord in the year 570.

—from the 2003 *Saint Herman Calendar*

Venerable Gabriel, Founder of Lesnov Monastery
Holy Martyr Pansophius of Alexandria
Saint Maurus, disciple of Saint Benedict

Day 15-Jan-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

The Healing of the Ten Lepers
Colossians 3:12-16; Luke 17:12-19
12 As God's elect, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with a heart of compassion, kindness, lowliness, humility, and perseverance.
13 Bear with one another, and forgive each other! If anyone has a complaint against anyone else, forgive, even as Christ forgave you.
14 Above all, walk in love, which is the bond of perfection.
15 Let the peace of God (to which also you were called in one body) rule in your hearts, and be thankful! 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.
In all wisdom, teach and admonish each other with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your heart to the Lord.

Gospel Reading: The Healing of the Ten Lepers

12 As he entered into a certain village, ten men who were lepers met him, and they stood at a distance.
13 They lifted up their voices, saying, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!' 14 When Jesus saw them, he told them, 'Go and show yourselves to the priests.
And it happened that as they went, they were cleansed.
15 One of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice.
16 He fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks; and this man was a Samaritan.
17 Jesus said, 'Were not ten cleansed? But where are the nine [others]? 18 Was no one found who came back to glorify God, except for this foreigner?' 19 Then Jesus said to him, 'Get up and go your way.
Your faith has healed you!'

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING

Today's gospel reading speaks of the Lord's healing ten men, who suffered from leprosy, and how only one of them returned to give thanks to Him.
This story with its grateful and ungrateful ones arouses in us the question of our own personal gratitude towards God and towards our neighbour.
Whilst gratitude could be such a wonderful thing in our lives, it for some reason seems at times to be too heavy a burden to carry.
It feels much easier to receive than to give thanks for what we have received, both from God and man.
However, 'great life starts from gratitude,' as someone has said, and it is essential for us, as Christians, to reflect on how we could increase our own gratitude towards God and other people.
I would like, today, to take just one way of practising gratitude towards the Lord; a way through which many other things might ensue.
This is to dedicate some concrete time and effort to go and venerate at the tomb of our Lord, as well as at other holy sites significant in His earthly life in the Holy Land.
The Holy Sepulchre in the Old City of Jerusalem today includes the place of Christ's crucifixion, namely Golgotha, the Stone of Anointing, the Holy Tomb itself, the Church of the Resurrection and the place of finding of the True Cross by St Helen.
Although it is not mandatory for Christians to visit these sites, it is nonetheless very beneficial, and can be a life changing event.
Also the Mount of Temptation, the River Jordan, Mount Tabor, Nazareth, Capernaum, Bethlehem, and so many other places are connected with particular events in the life of Christ Our own visit to these places can, on the one hand, be an expression of our personal gratitude towards Him and, on the other hand, these pilgrimage sites themselves and their sacred history can have a very powerful impact on us; such that can make us change inwardly towards becoming more like Him, towards obtaining Christ-likeness.
In this way, our own selves will be the best thanksgiving offering to Him.
After all, the greatest gift we can give to Him, according to St Gregory the Theologian, is ourselves.
As he says: 'Let us offer Him ourselves, which to God is the most precious and becoming of gifts.
… Let us become like Christ, since Christ became like us' (On Easter 1:4-5). If now we would like to make our thanksgiving pilgrimage to the Holy Land concretely connected to today's gospel, it will take us precisely where St Luke says, namely, to 'the region between Samaria and Galilee.
' There is, in that region, a Palestinian town, called Jenin, populated mainly by Muslims with only a few Orthodox Christian families surviving.
In this town, Christ two thousand years ago healed the ten lepers.
To honour this miracle St Helen had built a shrine there, and today at this site, in the midst of local houses, on a steep hill, there is, like a pearl, the church of ten

lepers, dedicated to St George the Great martyr.
It is a perfect marvel to see this beautiful stone church and meet with the local Orthodox there, who despite the remarkably difficult circumstances manage to survive in the midst of another religion and hold on their Orthodox Christian faith. May the Lord grant that we return to Him to give thanks in places such as the church of ten lepers, so that our faith be strengthened and our lives become worthy of faith in Him.
Hieromonk Melchisedec, Monastery of St John the Baptist, Essex

Day 16-Jan-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Veneration of the precious Chains of the Holy and Glorious Apostle Peter.

The story of St Peter's imprisonment and miraculous release by an Angel of God is told in Acts ch. 12. The chains which fell from his hands were collected by Christians and passed down through the generations as precious relics, finally coming to Constantinople and being placed in the Church of St Peter, where they worked many miracles and healings.

There is nothing superstitious about the veneration of clothing and other objects belonging to the Saints; the Acts of the Apostles describes how handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched the Apostle Paul would heal the sick (ch. 19), and that even the shadow of the Apostle Peter healed those on whom it fell (ch. 5). In the twentieth century, a shirt worn by St Nektarios on his death-bed healed a paralyzed man. The sanctity of those united to God extends not only to their bodies but at times to their garments.

Venerable Martyr Damaskin of Gabrovo

Saints Speusippus, Eleusippus, Meleusippus and their Grandmother Leonilla

Day 16-Jan-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: James 2:14-26; Mark 10:46-52
14 What good is it, my brethren, if someone claims to have faith but has no works? Can faith save such a person? 15 If a brother or sister is in rags and lacking daily food, 16 and one of you tells them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled' and does not give them what the body needs, what good is that? 17 Likewise faith, if it has no works, is dead in itself.
18 Yes, someone will say, 'You have faith, and I have works!' Show me your faith without works, and by my works, I will show you my faith.
19 You believe that God is one!d You do well! The demons also believe, and they shudder.
20 Fool! Will you not recognize that apart from works, faith is dead? 21 Was not our father Abraham justified by works, by offering up his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You can see that [his] faith was working with his actions, and that by works, faith was perfected.
23 Thus, the Scripture which says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him as righteousness' was fulfilled, and he was called the friend of God.
24 You see, then, that one is justified by works, and not only by faith.
h 25 In the same way, was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works, by receiving the messengers and sending them out another way? 26 For just as the body is dead apart from the spirit, so is faith dead apart from works.

Gospel reading:
46 Then, they arrived in Jericho.
As Jesus was leaving the city with his disciples and a great crowd, the son of Timaeus, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the road.
47 When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out, 'Jesus, you son of David, have mercy on me!' 48 Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet.
But Bartimaeus cried out even more, 'You son of David, have mercy on me!' 49 Jesus stood still and said, 'Call him.
They called the blind man and said to him, 'Cheer up! Get up! He is calling you!' 50 Having thrown his cloak aside, he got up and came to Jesus.
51 Jesus asked him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' The blind man replied, 'Rabboni, that I may see again!' 52 Jesus said to him, 'Be on your way! Your faith has made you well.
At once, the man received his sight and followed him along the way.

Day 17-Jan-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Our Holy Godbearing Father Anthony the Great (356).

'Saint Anthony, the Father of monks, was born in Egypt in251 of pious parents who departed this life while he was yet young. On hearing the words of the Gospel: "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell what thou hast, and give to the poor" (Matt. 19:21), he immediately put it into action. Distributing to the poor all he had, and fleeing from all the turmoil of the world, he departed to the desert. The manifold temptations he endured continually for the space of twenty years are incredible. His ascetical struggles by day and by night, whereby he mortified the uprisings of the passions and attained to the height of dispassion, surpass the bounds of nature; and the report of his deeds of virtue drew such a multitude to follow him, that the desert was transformed into a city, while he became, so to speak, the governor, lawgiver, and master-trainer of all the citizens of this newly-formed city. But the cities of the world also enjoyed the fruit of his virtue. When the Christians were being persecuted and put to death under Maximinus in 312, he hastened to their aid and consolation. When the Church was troubled by the Arians, he went with zeal to Alexandria in 335 and struggled against them in behalf of Orthodoxy. During this time, by the grace of his words, he also turned many unbelievers to Christ.

'He began his ascetical life outside his village of Coma in Upper Egypt, studying the ways of the ascetics and holy men there, and perfecting himself in the virtues of each until he surpassed them all. Desiring to increase his labours, he departed into the desert, and finding an abandoned fortress in the mountain, he made his dwelling in it, training himself in extreme fasting, unceasing prayer, and fierce conflicts with the demons. Here he remained, as mentioned above, about twenty years. Saint Athanasius the Great, who knew him personally and wrote his life, says that he came forth from the fortress "initiated in the mysteries and filled with the Spirit of God." Afterwards, because of the press of the faithful, who deprived him of his solitude, he was enlightened by God to journey with certain Bedouins, until he came to a mountain in the desert near the Red Sea, where he passed the remaining part

of his life. Saint Athanasius says of him that "his countenance had a great and wonderful grace. This gift also he had from the Saviour. For if he were present in a great company of monks, and any one who did not know him previously wished to see him, immediately coming forward he passed by the rest, and hurried to Anthony, as though attracted by his appearance. Yet neither in height nor breadth was he conspicuous above others, but in the serenity of his manner and the purity of his soul."

'So passing his life, and becoming an example of virtue and a rule for monastics, he reposed on January 17 in the year 356, having lived together some 105 years.' (Great Horologion)

Speaking of the demonic temptations and struggles with the passions that beset those who seek their salvation, St Anthony said: "All these trials are to your advantage. Do away with temptation and no one will be saved."

Pious Emperor Theodosius the Great (395)

He was born in Spain, became a general in the Imperial Army, and was crowned Emperor of the East in 379. He quickly made his Orthodoxy clear by decisively rejecting Arianism, which had divided Christians, troubled the Church, and confused previous emperors, for many years. He summoned the Second Ecumenical Council at Constantinople in 381, which reaffirmed the doctrine of Nicaea and proclaimed the divinity of the Holy Spirit. While Constantine had outlawed the persecution of Christians and made Christianity the religion of the state, Theodosius outlawed the worship of idols within the Empire.

Theodosius was several times guilty of anger and bloodshed during his reign, but, when corrected, always expressed sincere repentance and submitted himself to the authority and discipline of the Church. He endured a long excommunication and penance from Ambrose, bishop of Milan (December 7), for a massacre perpetrated at his order. Once he was about to enact bloody punishment of the people of Antioch for a rebellion, but relented when St Placilla (September 14) and Patriarch Flavian enjoined him to be merciful. In this, he showed a humility and submission to the Church almost unknown in Christian rulers before or since.

Having reigned for sixteen years, the Emperor Theodosius reposed in peace in 395 at the age of sixty.

Our Holy Father Makarios (Kalogeras) of Patmos (1737)

He was born to a prosperous family on the island of Patmos. As soon as he was old enough to leave home, he attended the Patriarchal School in Constantinople, where he distinguished himself. He became a monk, then a deacon, but always refused to be ordained to the priesthood, though the Metropolitan of Nikomedia wished Makarios to be his successor. Instead, he returned to Patmos in 1713 and entered the Monastery of St John the Theologian, where he remained until his death.

Though he lived in great asceticism and constant prayer, Saint Makarios

was moved by a concern for the salvation and education of the Orthodox people, who often lived in great ignorance, even of their own faith, under Ottoman rule. He established a school in a building adjacent to the monastery, and offered courses free of charge to any who could come. Modeling the curriculum on that of the Patriarchal School, he served more as a spiritual father than a worldly professor. The school grew steadily, partly due to generous contributions from a few wealthy Greek families and trade guilds in Constantinople. But students, many of them very poor, still had to pay for their own needs, and Saint Makarios used his own funds to aid the poorest of them. In addition, he secretly distributed any money that came to him personally to the poor on Patmos. The school at Patmos became famous throughout the Greek Church, and its head became a spiritual father not only to his students but througout the Greek nation. Bishops often asked him to write homilies; about sixty of these were published in book form as The Trumpet of the Gospel, which is still widely read today by the faithful. Having greatly edified thousands while laboring tirelessly for the salvation of his soul, Saint Makarios reposed in peace in 1737.

Anthony the New of the Berropas Skete
New Martyr George of Ioannina
Saint Achilles of Scetes

Day 17-Jan-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free
Readings of the day: James 3:1-10; Mark 11:11-23
3 The tongue as fire Not many of you should be teachers, my brothers, knowing
that we shall receive a stricter judgment.
2In many things, we all stumble.
Anyone who does not stumble in word is perfect, even able to bridle the whole
body! 3 Indeed, we put bits into the horses' mouths so that they may obey us, and
this way, we guide their whole body.
4 Or considerer the ships: although they are very large and driven by fierce winds,
they are guided by a very small rudder as the pilot desires.
5 Likewise, the tongue is a little member but it boasts great things! See how a
small fire can spread to a large forest! 6 The tongue is also a fire!a Among all our
members, the tongue is a world of wrongdoing which defiles the whole body.
It sets on fire the course of nature and it is set on fire by the fires of hell.
7 Every kind of animal, bird, reptile and sea creature is tamed and has been tamed
by mankind.
8 But nobody can tame the tongue! It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.
9 With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in
the image of God.
10 From the same mouth comes forth blessing and cursing.
My brethren, this should not be!

Gospel Reading:
1 1Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple.
After looking around at everything, since it was now evening, he went out to
Bethany with the Twelve.
12 The next day, as they were coming out from Bethany, Jesus was hungry.
13 Seeing in the distance a fig tree with leaves, he came to see if perhaps, he
might find something on it.
When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs.
14 Jesus then said to the tree, 'May no one ever eat fruit from you again!' and his
disciples heard it.
15 They arrived in Jerusalem and Jesus entered into the temple.
He began to drive out those who did business in the temple and he overthrew the
tables of the money changers, as well as the seats of those who sold doves.
16 He would not allow anyone to carry a container through the temple.

17 He taught them, saying, 'Is it not written, 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations?' But you have made it a den of thieves! 18 When the chief priests and the scribes heard this, they considered how they might destroy him.
As it is, they feared Jesus,a because the crowd was astonished at his teaching.
19 When evening came, he left the city.
20 As they passed by in the morning, the disciples saw the fig tree withered from the roots.
21 Remembering [what had happened], Peter said to him, 'Rabbi, look! The fig tree which you cursed has withered away!'
22 Jesus answered them, 'Have faith in God! 23 For amen, I tell you that if anyone tells this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' without doubt in the heart but believing that what he says is happening; he shall have whatever he says.

Day 18-Jan-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Our Holy Fathers Athanasius the Great (373) and Cyril (444), Patriarchs of Alexandria

Saint Athanasius, pillar of Orthodoxy and Father of the Church, was born in Alexandria in 275, to pious Christian parents. Even as a child, his piety and devotion to the Faith were so notable that Alexander, the Patriarch of the city, took Athanasius under his protection. As a student, he acquired a thorough education, but was more interested in the things of God than in secular learning, and withdrew for a time into the desert to sit at the feet of Saint Anthony (January 17), whose disciple he became and whose biography he later wrote. On returning to Alexandria, he was ordained to the diaconate and began his public labors for the Church. He wrote his treatise On the Incarnation, when he was only twenty. (It contains a phrase, still often quoted today, that express in a few words some of the depths of the Mystery of the Incarnation: God became man that man might become god.)

Just at this time Arius, a priest in Alexandria, was promoting his enticing view that the Son and Word of God is not of one essence with the Father, but a divine creation of the Father. This view, which (as Athanasius realized) strikes at the very possibility of mankind's salvation, gained wide acceptance and seemed for a time to threaten the Christian Faith itself. In 325, the Emperor Constantine the Great convoked a Council of the Church at Nicaea to settle the turmoil that the Arian teaching had spread through the Church. Athanasius attended the Council, and defended the Orthodox view so powerfully that he won the admiration of the Orthodox and the undying enmity of the Arians. From that time forth his life was founded on the defense of the true consubstantiality (homoousia) of the Son with the Father.

In 326, not long before his death, Patriarch Alexander appointed Athanasius to be his successor, and Athanasius was duly elevated to the patriarchal throne. He was active in his pastoral role, traveling throughout Egypt, visiting churches and monasteries, and working tirelessly not only to put down the Arian heresy, but to resolve various schisms and moral declines

that affected his territory.

Though the Arian heresy had apparently been condemned once and for all at Nicea, Arius had many powerful allies throughout the Empire, even in the Imperial court, and Athanasius was soon subjected to many kinds of persecution, some local, some coming from the Imperial throne itself. Though he was Patriarch of Alexandria for more than forty years, a large amount of that time was spent in hiding from powerful enemies who threatened him with imprisonment or death. Twice he fled to Rome for protection by the Pope, who in the early centuries of the Church was a consistent champion of Orthodoxy against its various enemies. From his various hiding places, Athanasius issued tracts, treatises and epistles which helped to rally the faithful throughout Christendom to the Orthodox cause.

In 366, the Emperor Valens, fearing a revolt of the Egyptians on behalf of their beloved Archbishop, officially restored Athanasius to favor, and he was able to spend the last seven years of his life in peace. Of his forty-seven years as Patriarch, about seventeen were spent in hiding or exile. He reposed in peace in 373, having given his entire adult life, at great suffering, to the defense of the Faith of Christ.

With St Athanasius, the Church commemorates St Cyril (Kyrillos), also Archbishop of Alexandria (412-44). His lot was to defend the Faith against the heretic Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople, who denied that Christ in his Incarnation truly united the divine with the human nature. Cyril attempted in private correspondence to restore Nestorius to the Christian faith, and when this failed he, along with Pope Celestine of Rome, led the defense of Orthodoxy against Nestorius' teaching. Saint Cyril presided at the Third Ecumenical Council in 431, at which the Nestorian error was officially overthrown. After guiding his flock for thirty-two years, he reposed in 444.

Apolytikion (Sts. Athanasios and Cyril)

Shining forth with works of Orthodoxy, ye quenched every false belief and teaching and became trophy-bearers and conquerors. And since ye made all things rich and with true piety, greatly adorning the Church with magnificence, Athanasios and wise Cyril, ye both have worthily found Christ God, Who doth grant great mercy unto all.

Saint Maxim, Archbishop of Wallachia
Xenia the Martyr

Day 18-Jan-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: James 3:11-4:6; Mark 11:23-26
11 Does a spring pour forth fresh and salty water from the same opening? 12 My brethren, can a fig tree produce olives, or [can] a vine [produce] figs? Likewise, salt water cannot produce fresh water.
13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let such a person show by a good conduct that his deeds are done in the gentleness of wisdom.
14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not boast and do not lie against the truth.
15 This 'wisdom' is not the one that comes down from above! It is earthly, sensual, and demonic.
16 Where there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there is confusion and every evil deed.
17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceful, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and hypocrisy.
18 Now, the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.
4 Cause of conflicts These wars and conflicts among you, where do they come from? Is it not from your desires that wage war in your members?
2 You lust, and do not have! You kill, covet, and [still] cannot obtain! You fight and make war.
You do not have because you do not ask!
3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, in order to spend it for your pleasures.
4 Adulterers and adulteresses!d Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility with God? Whoever wants to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God!
5 Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, 'The spirit which dwells in us longs to envy'?
6 But he has given a greater, as the Scripture says: God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

Gospel Reading:
23 For amen, I tell you that if anyone tells this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea, without doubt in the heart but believing that what he says is happening; he shall have whatever he says.
24 Therefore, I tell you, whatever things you pray for and ask for, believe that you

have received them, and you shall have them.
25 Whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive; so that your Father who is in heaven may also forgive your transgressions.
26 But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions.

Day 19-Jan-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Our Holy Father Macarius (Makarios)the Great (~390)

He was born around 300 in Egypt and in his youth was a camel driver. While still living in his village, he withdrew to a small cell to devote himself exclusively to ascesis and prayer. When the people there wanted to make him a priest, he fled to another village. There a young woman who was discovered to be pregnant falsely accused Macarius of being the father. Macarius was seized, reviled and beaten, but made no effort to defend himself; instead he took on more work in order to provide for the mother and her child. When his innocence was finally discovered, the townspeople came to ask his forgiveness; but he fled to the desert of Sketis (now called Wadi Natrun). He was then thirty years old, and for the rest of his life he dwelt in the desert.

His humility and detachment from earthly things were so great that once, when he discovered a thief stealing his few possessions, he helped the man load them onto his camel, even pointing out to him the few things he had missed. Once a demon spoke to him thus: "Everything you do, I do too: you fast, but I never eat; you keep vigil, but I never sleep; you only exceed me in one way: your humility. Because of this I am helpless against you." The Saint said that the demons could be put in two categories: those who arouse passions such as anger, lust and greed; and others, much more dreadful, who deceive us by spiritual illusion, blasphemy and heresy.

Saint Macarius soon became known throughout Egypt, and many visitors came to his isolated home. He welcomed all with joy, judging no one and providing hospitality for all. His compassion extended to all, and he prayed even for the damned. Once he found the skull of a pagan priest, which addressed him, saying, "Each time you have pity on us who are in torment, immersed in fire and darkness, we receive a measure of comfort and are allowed to see the faces of our fellow sufferers."

Saint Macarius became a disciple of St Anthony the Great, and in his turn became the spiritual Father of many who came to live near him in the desert.

He is considered the founder of the ancient and venerable monastic community at Sketis. At the age of forty he was ordained a priest at the urging of St Anthony, so that he and his brethren would not have to walk the forty miles of desert to Nitria to go to church.

Knowing that he was soon to die, he visited his disciples one last time, saying to them with tears in his eyes, "Let us weep, brethren, so that our eyes flow ceaselessly with tears, before we go to where our tears will scald our bodies." Soon thereafter he reposed. His relics now rest in the Coptic monastery that bears his name. The collection of fifty Spiritual Homilies attributed to St Macarius is a treasury of Orthodox spirituality.

Our Holy Father Mark Eugenikos, Metropolitan of Ephesus and Confessor of the Orthodox Faith (1443)

This holy defender of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church labored in the final days of the Byzantine Empire, when, pressed on all sides by the Turks, the Emperor in desperation sought union with (or rather submission to) the Papacy in hopes of obtaining aid from the West. It was St Mark who stood almost alone to prevent such a disaster to the Faith.

He was born in Constantinople in 1392 to devout parents. He received a thorough education and seemed destined for a secular career, but at the age of twenty- six he abandoned all worldly claims and became a monk in a small monastery in Nicomedia. Soon the Turkish threat forced him to return to Constantinople, where, continuing in the monastic life, he wrote a number of treatises on prayer and the dogmas of the Church. In time he was ordained priest, then, at the insistence of the Emperor John VIII Paleologos was made Metropolitan of Ephesus. The Emperor also prevailed on him to join the delegation which traveled to the Council of Florence to consider the reunion of the Orthodox Church and the churches under the Papacy. (Saint Mark went as exarch of the Patriarchs of Jerusalem, Antioch and Alexandria, who were unable to attend.)

The Greek delegation included the Emperor and the Patriarch of Constantinople. All, including Metropolitan Mark, began with great hopes that a true union in faith might result from the Council, but as the sessions proceeded, it soon became clear that Pope Eugenius and his theologians were interested only in securing submission of the Eastern Church to the Papacy and its theology. The Metropolitan spoke forcefully against various Latin dogmas such as the filioque and Purgatory, but the Greek delegation, desperate for western aid, bowed to expediency and agreed to sign a document of Union which would have denied the Orthodox Faith itself. Saint Mark was the only member of the delegation who refused to sign. When the Pope heard of this, he said "The bishop of Ephesus has not signed, so we have achieved nothing!"

When the delegation returned to Constantinople, the signers of the false Union were received with universal condemnation by the people, while

Metropolitan Mark was hailed as a hero. The churches headed by Unionists were soon almost empty, while the people flocked to the churches headed by those loyal to Orthodoxy. Saint Mark left the City to avoid concelebrating with the Unionist Patriarch. He was exiled by the Emperor to Lemnos, but was freed in 1442. He continued to oppose the Union until his repose in 1444. In 1452 the Union was officially proclaimed in Constantinople, but the hoped-for Western aid was not forthcoming, and the City fell to the Turks in 1453.

Saint Arsenius, Bishop of Corfu
Blessed Theodore, Fool-for-Christ of Novgorod
Virgin Martyr Euphrasia of Nicomedia
Translation of the Relics of Saint Gregory the Theologian

Day 19-Jan-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: James 4:7-5:9; Mark 11:27-33

7 Therefore, submit yourselves to God, but resist the devil, and he will flee from you.
8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.
Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you who are double-minded.
9 Lament, mourn, and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to gloom.
f 10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he will exalt you.
11 Do not speak against one another, brethren.
Whoever speaks against one of the brethren and judges speaks against the law and judges the law.
But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge! 12 Only one is the lawgiver, he who is able to save and to destroy.
But who are you to judge another? Warning against presumption 13 Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow, we will go into this city, spend a year there, do business and make a profit.
14 Yet, you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow! Truly, what is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.
15 Instead, you should say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.
16 Nevertheless, you boast and brag! All such boasting is evil.
17 If someone knows how to do what is good and yet does not do it, it is a sin.
5 Warning to the wealthy Listen, you who are rich: weep and howl for the miseries that are coming on you.
2 Your riches are corrupted and your garments are eaten by moths.
3 Your gold and silver are rusted; their rust will be a testimony against you and it will eat your flesh like fire.
You have laid up your treasure in the last days.
4 Behold, the wages of the laborers who worked in your fields and which you have kept back by fraud cry out! The cries of those who reaped [for you] have reached the ears of the Lord Sabbaoth.
5 On earth, you have lived in luxury and taken your pleasure.
You have eaten your hearts' content as in a day of slaughter.
6 You have condemned, you have murdered the righteous one who does not resist you.
7 Therefore, be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord.

Behold, the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it, until it receives the early and late rain.
8 You also should be patient.
Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.
9 Brethren, do not grumble against one another, so that you will not be judged. Behold, the judge stands at the door!

Gospel Reading:
27 They returned to Jerusalem, and as Jesus was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the presbyters came to him.
28 They began to ask him, 'By what authority do you do these things? Who gave you the authority to do such things?' 29 Jesus replied, 'I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things.
30 The baptism of John- was it from heaven, or from men? Answer me.
31 They debated among themselves, saying, 'If we say, 'From heaven' he will reply, 'Why then did you not believe him?' 32 But dare we say, 'From men?" They feared the people, for all considered that John was indeed a prophet.
33 They answered Jesus, 'We do not know!' Jesus said to them, 'Then neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things.

Day 20-Jan-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Our Venerable Father Euthymius the Great (473)

'This Saint, who was from Melitine in Armenia, was the son of pious parents named Paul and Dionysia. He was born about 377. Since his mother had been barren, he was named Euthymius which means "good cheer" or "joy" for this is what his parents experienced at his birth. He studied under Eutroius, the Bishop of Melitene, by whom he was ordained and entrusted with the care of the monasteries of Melitene. Then, after he had come to Palestine about the year 406, he became the leader of a multitude of monks. Through him, a great tribe of Arabs was turned to piety, when he healed the ailing son of their leader Aspebetos. Aspebetos was baptized with all his people; he took the Christian name of Peter, and was later consecrated Bishop for his tribe, being called the "Bishop of the Tents." Saint Euthymius also fought against the Nestorians, Eutychians, and Manichaeans. When Eudocia, the widow of Saint Theodosius the Younger, had made her dwelling in Palestine, and had fallen into the heresy of the Monophysites which was championed in Palestine by a certain Theodosius, she sent envoys to Saint Symeon the Stylite in Syria (see Sept.1), asking him his opinion of Eutyches and the Council of Chalcedon which had condemned him; Saint Symeon, praising the holiness and Orthodoxy of Saint Euthymius near whom she dwelt, sent her to him to be delivered from her error (the holy Empress Eudocia is commemorated Aug. 13). He became the divine oracle of the Church, or rather, "the vessel of divine utterance," as a certain historian writes. He was the instructor and elder of Saint Sabbas the Sanctified. Having lived for ninety-six years, he reposed in 473, on January 20.' (Great Horologion)

Apolytikion

Be glad, O barren one, that hast not given birth; be of good cheer, thou that hast not travailed; for a man of desires hath multiplied thy children of the

Spirit, having planted them in piety and reared them in continence to the perfection of the virtues. By his prayers, O Christ our God, make our life peaceful.

Holy Martyrs Inna, Pinna and Rimma (Nirra) (1st – 2nd c.)

They were disciples of Saint Andrew the Apostle, the first missionary to the lands north of the Black Sea. They witnessed to Christ around the Danube River and converted many to the Faith. They were arrested and condemned, and died immersed to their necks in icy water.

In the Prologue, St Nikolai Velimirovich describes them as the 'first Slavic martyrs mentioned in history.' In ancient martyrologies they are referred to as Scythians, a term applied to the peoples living around the Black Sea in the early Christian era. It is doubtful that they were members of the Slavic people as we understand them today, though it seems that they were the first martyrs in the lands that are now inhabited by the Slavic people.

Saint Peter the Tax Collector (6th c.)

""Saint Peter, being of patrician rank, was appointed by the Emperor Justinian (527-65) to administer the Roman province of Africa. Harsh and without an ounce of compassion, he became universally known as 'the Miser'. One day a beggar was importuning him insistently for alms, so he picked up one of the warm loaves which his servant had just brought in and threw it like a stone at his head. The beggar seized it with delight and made off. Two days later Peter suddenly fell ill with the fever and saw himself appear at the Last Judgment to give an account of all his deeds. A pair of scales was brought before him and swarthy creatures placed all his evil actions on to the left-hand dish, while bright angels stood to the right, in dismay at having nothing by way of a good deed to put on to the right-hand side except the loaf which he had thrown in anger at the beggar. Peter then woke up with a start and, forgetful of his illness, hastened to give away all his goods to the needy, even his clothing. Afterwards in a dream, he saw Christ wearing the clothes he had given away, and so he decided not to stop at that but to sell himself as slave to a goldsmith in order to give alms of the price paid for him. Some time later, fearing lest his identity be discovered, he fled to Jerusalem and thence to Constantinople, where he gave back his soul in peace to God in his old house." (Synaxarion)

The source of this story is the longer Life of St John the Merciful (November 12).

Zacharias the New Martyr

Martyr Anna at Rome

Day 20-Jan-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 1 Peter 1:1, 2, 10-12, 2:6-10; Mark 12:1-12
1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the elect who are living as exiles, scattered in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.
2 This is according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, so that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with his blood.
Grace be to you and may peace be multiplied! 10 About this salvation, the prophets (who prophesied of the grace that would come to you) did much research and investigation.
11 They were investigating the time and circumstances that the Spirit of Christ (which was in them) pointed to by predicting the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow them.
12 They received revelation that they were servants of these things not for themselves but for you.
These [things] have now been announced to you by those who preached the Good News by the Holy Spirit sent out from heaven, and [even the] angels desire to gaze upon these things.
6 As the Scripture has it: Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, chosen, and precious: Whoever believes in him will not be disappointed.
7 For you who believe, this brings honor, but for those who are disobedient: The stone which the builders rejected, has become the chief cornerstone, 8 and: a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.
Indeed, they stumble at the word and are disobedient, which is what they were laid aside for.
9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.
10 In the past, you were not a people, but now, you are God's people.
In the past, you had not obtained mercy, but now, you have obtained mercy.

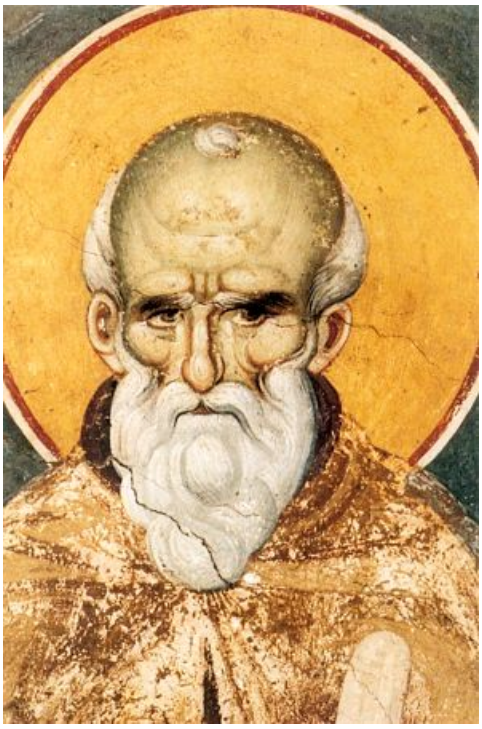
Gospel reading:
He began to speak to them in parables.
'A man planted a vineyard, put a hedge around it, dug a pit for the winepress, and built a tower.
He then rented it to tenant farmers and left for another country.
2 When it was time, he sent a servant to the farmers to receive his share of the fruit of the vineyard.

3 But they took the servant, beat him, and sent him away empty.
4 Again, the owner sent another servant to them, and they threw stones at him, wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully treated.
5 Again he sent another; and they killed him along with many others, beating some, and killing some.
6 The man still had one left to send, his beloved son.
Finally, he sent him to them, saying: 'They will respect my son!' 7 But the tenants of the vineyard said among themselves, 'This is the heir! Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours!' 8 They took him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.
9 What then will the lord of the vineyard do? He will come to destroy the farmers, and he will give the vineyard to others.
10 Have you not even read this Scripture: 'The very stone which the builders rejected, Has become the head of the corner.
11 This is the Lord's doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes?'b The question of paying taxes to Caesar 12 They kept trying to arrest Jesus, but they feared the multitude because they understood that he had spoken the parable against them. So they left him and went away.

Day 21-Jan-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Our Venerable Father Maximos the Confessor (662)



He was born to a noble family in Constantinople in 580. (But, according to a recently-discovered account, he may have been born in Palestine.) He showed uncommon piety and depth of theological understanding from an early age, and wrote some of the Church's most profound theological works. He became the chief secretary of the Emperor Heraclius and his grandson Constans. But when the Monothelite heresy took hold in the royal court, Maximos could not bear to be surrounded by this error and left for the Monastery at Chrysopolis, where he later became abbot. From the monastery, he battled Monothelitism in homilies and treatises that exercised a considerable influence; so much so that the Emperor Constans ordered him either to accept Monothelite belief or keep silence. Maximos refused to do either, and he was arrested. His tongue was torn out, his right hand cut off, and he was sentenced to exile. He died of his wounds and torments while still in prison awaiting deportation, at the age of eighty-two, in the year 662. The Great Horologion comments that "at that time only he and his few disciples were Orthodox in the East." Nonetheless, his lonely and costly stand, whose fruit he did not see in his own lifetime, preserved the Orthodox Faith when emperors and patriarchs alike had fallen away.

Saint Maximos' right hand is venerated today at the Monastery of St Paul on Mt Athos.

Holy Martyr Agnes of Rome (~304)

She was a virgin of noble birth who lived in Rome during the reign of Diocletian. She was martyred at the age of twelve. From an early age she loved chastity ("Agne", the origin of her name, means "pure" or "chaste" in Greek.) Her purity became so well known that she was sought out by many women of Rome, whom she exhorted to accept Christ as the one true God, and to honor him with their chastity. For this she was in time arrested and brought before the City Prefect. When she refused to deny Christ, the Prefect had her handed over to a brothel; but everyone who attempted to violate her

was mysteriously prevented, and one especially vicious and lewd attacker was miraculously struck dead. In front of the Prefect's soldiers, Agnes prayed to God and the dead man was restored to life. Many pagan spectators, and the Prefect himself, cried "Great is the power of the Christians!" But others claimed that Agnes had performed this wonder by sorcery and should be killed. The Prefect ordered that she be burned to death. She gave up her life serenely and with prayers on her lips. Some Christians gathered her relics and placed them in a tomb where a magnificent church was later built. Saint Agnes' holy relics remain a source of healing to this day.

Our Holy Father Maximos the Greek (1556)

He was born Michael Tivolis in 1470. In his early youth he traveled to Italy, where many scholars had fled to preserve Hellenic culture despite the fall of Constantinople. After completing his studies in Florence, he went to the Holy Mountain in 1507 and entered Vatopedi Monastery, where he received the name of Maximos. Ten years later he was sent to Russia in answer to a request of Grand Prince Basil Ivanovich, who sought someone to translate works of the Holy Fathers on the Psalter, as well as other Church books, into Slavonic. Maximos completed this work with such success that he was made to stay in Russia to correct the existing translations (from Greek to Slavonic) of the Scriptures and liturgical books, and to preach. His work aroused the jealousy of some native monks, and Maximos was falsely accused of plotting against the Prince. In 1525 he was condemned as a heretic by a church court and banished to the Monastery of Volokolamsk, where he lived as a prisoner, not only suffering cold and extreme physical privation but being denied Holy Communion and the use of books.

One day an angel appeared to him and said 'Have patience: You will be delivered from eternal torment by sufferings here below.' In thanks for this divine comfort, St Maximus wrote a canon to the Holy Spirit on the walls of his cell in charcoal, since he was denied the use of paper and pen. (This canon is sung on Pentecost Monday in some Russian and Serbian Monasteries). Six years later he was tried again and condemned to indefinite imprisonment in chains at a monastery in Tver. Happily, the Bishop of Tver supported him, and he was able to continue his theological work and carry on a large correspondence despite his confinement. He endured these grim conditions for twenty years. Toward the end of his life, he was finally freed by the Tsar in response to pleas on his behalf by the Patriarchs of Constantinople and

Alexandria and the intervention of pious Russian nobles. He was received with honor in Moscow, and allowed to carry on his theological work at the Lavra. The Tsar Ivan IV came to honor him highly, partly because the Saint had foretold the death of the Tsar's son. When the Tsar called a Church Council to fight the doctrines of some who had brought the Calvinist heresy into Russia, he asked St Maximos to attend. Too old and weak to travel, the Saint sent a brilliant refutation of the heresy to the Council; this was his last written work. He reposed in peace in 1556, aged eighty-six. Not long after his death, he was glorified by the Church in Greece as a Holy Confessor and 'Enlightener of Russia.' In 1988 (!) he was added to the calendar of Saints by the Moscow Patriarchate.

Holy Hieromartyr Neophytus of Nicaea

Day 21-Jan-2023 Saturday

Fast Free
Readings of the day: 1 Thessalonians 5:14-23; Luke 17:3-10
.
14 We exhort you, brethren, admonish the disorderly, encourage the fainthearted, support the weak, be patient toward all.
15 See that no one returns evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good, both for one another and for all.
16 Rejoice always! 17 Pray without ceasing! 18 Give thanks in everything because this is God' will in Christ Jesus for you.
19 Do not quench the Spirit! 20 Do not despise prophesies! 21Test all things, and hold firmly to what is good! 22 Abstain from every form of evil! 23 May the God of peace himself sanctify you completely.
May your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

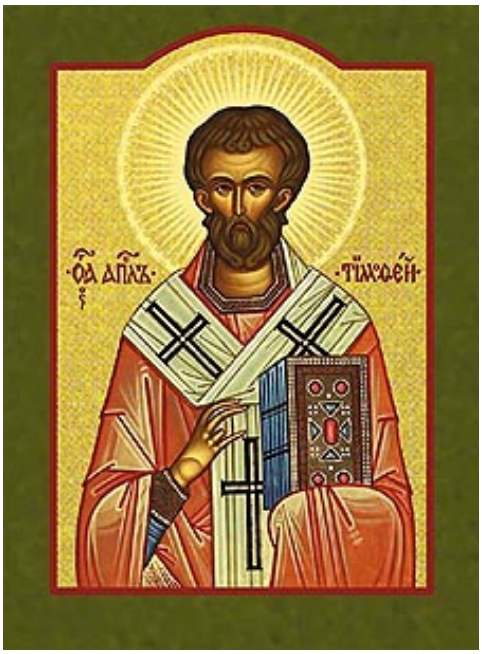
Gospel Reading:

3 Be careful! If your brother sins against you, rebuke him.
If he repents, forgive him.
4 If he sins against you seven times in the day, and comes back seven times, saying: 'I repent!' you must forgive him.
Faith like mustard seed 5The apostles also said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith!' 6 The Lord said, 'If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you would tell this sycamore tree, 'Be uprooted and transplanted into the sea,' and it would obey you!
The attitude of a servant 7 Now, who is there among you, having a servant plowing or sheepherding, that will say when that servant returns from the field, 'Come at once and sit down at the table.
8 Instead, will you not tell him, 'Prepare my supper, clothe yourself properly, and serve me while I eat and drink.
Afterwards, you may eat and drink?' 9 Does the master thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded? I think not!c 10 So you also, when you have done all those things which you are commanded [to do], say, 'We are unworthy servants, we have [only] done our duty!"

Day 22-Jan-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Holy Apostle Timothy



This is the Apostle to whom two of St Paul's Epistles are addressed. He was from Lystra in Lycaonia, born to a pagan Greek father and a Jewish mother. His mother, whose name was Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois, brought him up in piety and love of the Scriptures. The Apostle Paul converted the two women during his first missionary visit to Lystra; returning seven years later, he found Timothy full of zeal for Christ, and baptized him. Timothy became his closest disciple: in his epistles, St Paul calls calls him "my dearly beloved son." So that Timothy would be able to preach the Gospel in the synagogues, St Paul personally circumcised him.

The Apostle Paul consecrated Timothy as the first bishop of Ephesus. As such, he became a disciple and exarch of St John the Evangelist, who supervised all the churches in Asia. In AD 97, he attempted to oppose the celebration of a festival to Artemis; the pagans, enraged, mobbed him and beat him to death. He was buried near the tomb of St John. In 356 his precious relics were translated (along with those of Sts Andrew and Luke) to Constantinople and enshrined in the Church of the Holy Apostles. In 1204 they were stolen by the Latin Crusaders when they pillaged the city.

Holy Martyr Anastasius of Persia (628)

He was a Persian, the son of a Magus, a soldier in the Persian army under Chosroes II, who at that time was making inroads into the Christian Empire. His Persian name was Magundat. Chosroes captured Jerusalem in 614, and carried away the Precious Cross as a trophy. Magundat heard of this, and of all the miracles worked by the Cross; and he wondered why the ruins of an instrument of torture were so revered by the Christians. Seeking out Christian elders to answer his questions, he learned of the Incarnation, life, Crucifixion and Resurrection of the Christ, and with joy embraced the Christian Faith as Truth. He was baptized by St Modestus, Patriarch of Jerusalem, and given the name of Anastasius. At the same time, he took monastic vows. For a time he lived in a monastery in Jerusalem, but then went forth, found some Persian

Magi at Caesarea, and chastised them for embracing delusions. Since he was in Persian territory (as he well knew), he was taken to the Persian governor, interrogated, imprisoned, and finally taken with other captives to Persia. There, despite many severe tortures, he refused to return to his former error, and was hanged by one hand, strangled, then beheaded.

Saint Joseph Samakos the Sanctified of Crete

Day 22-Jan-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Sunday of Zacchaios;
1 Timothy 4:9-15; Luke 19:1-10
Epistle Reading: St.
Paul's First Letter to Timothy 4:9-15 Timothy, my son, the saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance.
For to this end we toil and suffer reproach, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.
Command and teach these things.
Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.
Till I come, attend to the public reading of scripture, to preaching, to teaching.
Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the council of elders laid their hands upon you.
Practice these duties, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress.

Gospel Reading: Sunday of Zacchaios; Luke 19:1-10

At that time, Jesus was passing through Jericho.
And there was a man named Zacchaios; he was a chief collector, and rich.
And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not, on account of the crowd, because he was small of stature.
So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was to pass that way.
And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaios, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today.
So he made haste and came down, and received him joyfully.
And when they saw it they all murmured, 'He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.
And Zacchaios stood and said to the Lord, 'Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I

give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold.
And Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.
For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost.

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING

Today’s episode of Zacchaeus’s meeting with Christ is one of the most powerful of all the stories of Christ’s encounters in its meaning and message, filling us with 'faith, hope, but above all with love" (cf. 1 Cor. 13:13). It gives us hope that however sinful we might be, however despised and rejected, there are no boundaries for Christ’s love and compassion to reach us even at the very edge of society, even at the very bottom of moral degradation.

Tax-collectors, as Zacchaeus, were not only on fringes of Jewish society, but even beyond them: they were outcasts, considered to be immoral and depraved robbers, their humanity was denied to them.

According to rabbinical teachings, Jewish people had to reject any good gesture, even almsgiving offered by such 'degraded underdogs".

Even to visit their houses was deemed 'indecent" (Lk. 19:8). Christ was always displeased and even filled with holy 'anger, being grieved for the hardness of human hearts" (Mk. 3:3), whenever He encountered such an attitude towards any person, especially towards 'little ones".

Many people nowadays would share in one way or the other Zacchaeus’ state of rejection, his abandonment, his sense of 'no longer belonging" to humanity, with no chance of relationship with others, bearing one social stigma, or the other.

There is a sense that such an attitude of his society towards Zacchaeus made him what he was and placed him where he was.

Christ showed a different attitude: He teaches us in today’s story that we cannot expect others to act in a human way unless we first treat them as humans.

In startling contrast to his Jewish pharisaic surroundings, alien and hostile, Christ was the first amongst all other men to 'notice" Zacchaeus as a human being, calling him by human name, sharing his (lonely hereto) table, inviting him back into the fellowship of humanity.

Only love can generate love, only a human attitude to another person can transform him or her into human.

Today’s story bequeaths unto us this transforming power of love that addressing a human person as a person, seeing in them the image of God, a 'child of Abraham" can make them 'human", triggering a profound transfiguration of their life and personality, inaugurating a restoration of the Image of God in them, bringing them SALVATION, as Christ did to Zacchaeus and to all his household.

'This day is salvation come to this house" (Lk. 19:9). Salvation therefore is not just a remote, mystical, eschatological, philosophical, intellectually intricate concept: it hit Zacchaeus in a very real and actual way — it made him 'stand up" (Greek

'statheis" – Lk. 19:9) — for the first time, as hypostasis, as someone 'who is", as a person, raised from non-existence — and given a voice to 'speak".
How did this salvation manifest in him? Archimandrite Sophrony used to say: 'Salvation in God is life in the likeness of God’s own life".
Christ passed unto Zacchaeus His divine state of love: Zacchaeus was filled with compassion (Lk. 6:36) and his heart immediately reached out to all those misérables on the fringes of society, of the world, of humanity, where he once was. May this story impart unto us all this salvation that we shall burn with Zacchaeus’ desire and with all the saints 'pray for the whole human race, that all people may turn to the Saviour and find peace in Him, for Divine love would have all men to be saved" (St Silouan the Athonite). Hieromonk Nikolai Sakharov

Day 23-Jan-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Hieromartyr Clement of Ancyra, and Martyr Agathangelus (296)

He was from Ancyra in Galatia, son of a pagan father and a Christian mother named Euphrosyne. His mother prophesied on her deathbed that he would suffer great torments for Christ over many years. After her death he was adopted and reared by a pious woman named Sophia. From the age of twelve, he began to fast and pray like the monks, so that he was soon ordained a deacon, and became Bishop of Ancyra at the age of twenty. His piety and zeal for the faith attracted the attention of the Imperial Governor of the region, who had him arrested. Thus began Clement's twenty-eight years of almost continuous suffering for the Faith. When he stood firm despite many tortures, he was sent to the Emperor Diocletian in Rome. The Emperor showed him a table set with costly vessels on one side, and another decked with instruments of torture on the other, and bade Clement to make his choice. The Saint replied: "These precious vessels remind how much more glorious must be the eternal good things of Paradise; and these instruments of torture remind me of the everlasting punishments of hell that await those who deny the Lord."

The Saint was viciously tortured, then transported to Nicomedia, where a converted pagan named Agathangelus ('good angel') became his companion. For many years they endured unspeakable torments alternating with long imprisonments, but nothing would move them to deny the precious Faith of Christ. After twenty-eight years of suffering, Agathangelus was beheaded; but Clement was briefly paroled and allowed to celebrate the services of Theophany and to give the holy Communion to his fellow-Christians. A few days later, as he was again celebrating the Divine Liturgy, some pagan soldiers burst into the church and beheaded him at the altar.

Righteous Father Dionysius of Olympus

Commemoration of the Sixth Ecumenical Council

Day 23-Jan-2023 Monday

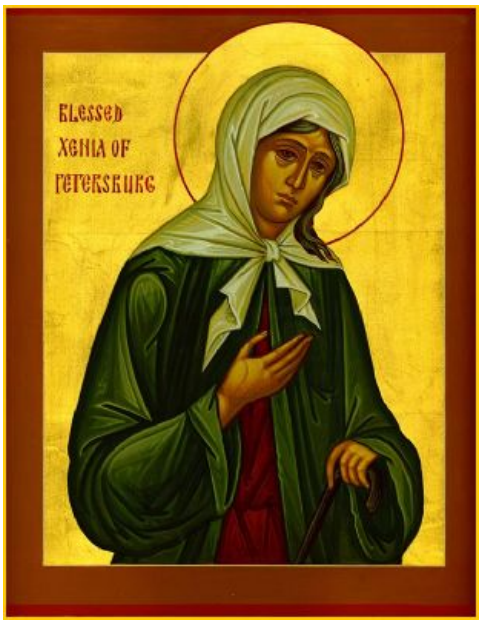
Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Ephesians 1:22-2:3; Mark 10:46-52
22 God put all things in subjection under his feet and granted him to be head over
all things for the sake of the Church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who
fills all in all.
2 The gift of God You were dead in transgressions and sins, 2and this was your
lifestyle according to the age of this world, according to the prince of the power of
the air, the spirit who now works in the children of disobedience.
3We used to live among them and we used to live in self-indulgence, doing the
desires of the {fallen} flesh and mind, and we were by nature children of wrath, just
as the others.

Gospel Reading:
46 Then, they arrived in Jericho.
As Jesus was leaving the city with his disciples and a great crowd, the son of
Timaeus, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the road.
47 When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out, 'Jesus,
you son of David, have mercy on me!' 48 Many rebuked him and told him to be
quiet.
But Bartimaeus cried out even more, 'You son of David, have mercy on me!' 49
Jesus stood still and said, 'Call him.
They called the blind man and said to him, 'Cheer up! Get up! He is calling you!' 50
Having thrown his cloak aside, he got up and came to Jesus.
51 Jesus asked him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' The blind man replied,
'Rabboni, that I may see again!' 52 Jesus said to him, 'Be on your way! Your faith
has made you well.
At once, the man received his sight and followed him along the way.

Day 24-Jan-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Our Holy Mother Xenia of Petersburg, fool for Christ (~1800)



She was born about 1730, and as a young woman married an army colonel named Andrei, a handsome and dashing man fond of worldly living. When she was twenty-six years old, her husband died suddenly after drinking with his friends, leaving Xenia a childless widow. Soon afterward, she gave away all her possessions and disappeared from St Petersburg for eight years; it is believed that she spent the time in a hermitage, or even a monastery, learning the ways of the spiritual life. When she returned to St Petersburg, she appeared to have lost her reason: she dressed in her husband's army overcoat, and would only answer to his name. She lived without a home, wandering the streets of the city, mocked and abused by many. She accepted alms from charitable people, but immediately gave them away to the poor: her only food came from meals that she sometimes accepted from those she knew. At night she withdrew to a field outside the city where she knelt in prayer until morning.

Slowly, the people of the city noticed signs of a holiness that underlay her seemingly deranged life: she showed a gift of prophecy, and her very presence almost always proved to be a blessing. The Synaxarion says "The blessing of God seemed to accompany her wherever she went: when she entered a shop the day's takings would be noticeably greater; when a cabman gave her a lift he would get plenty of custom; when she embraced a sick child it would soon get better. So compassion, before long, gave way to veneration, and people generally came to regard her as the true guardian angel of the city."

Forty-five years after her husband's death, St Xenia reposed in peace at the age of seventy-one, sometime around 1800. Her tomb immediately became a place of pilgrimage: so many people took soil from the gravesite as a blessing that new soil had to be supplied regularly; finally a stone slab was placed over the grave, but this too was gradually chipped away by the faithful. Miracles, healings and appearances of St Xenia occur to this day, to those who visit her tomb or who simply ask her intercessions. Her prayers are

invoked especially for help in finding employment, a home, or a spouse (all of which she renounced in her own life). A pious custom is to offer a Panachida / Trisagion Service for the repose of her husband Andrei, for whom she prayed fervently throughout her life.

Saint Xenia was first officially glorified by the Russian Orthodox Church outside Russia in 1978; then by the Moscow Patriarchate in 1988.

Our Venerable Mother Xenia of Rome, with her two maidservants (5th c.)

She was the daughter of a noble Christian family in Rome, and was named Eusebia in Baptism. Though she desired to offer up her virginity to Christ, her parents arranged a marriage for her against her wishes. On her wedding night, she secretly fled the city, accompanied by two slaves, and took ship for Alexandria. When she reached the island of Kos, she changed her name to Xenia ('Stranger'), and prayed to God that, as he had sent the Apostle Paul to St Thecla (see September 24), he would send her a true guide on the path to salvation. Soon a holy Elder named Paul found her and made her his spiritual child. He took her and her two companions to Mylassa in Caria (where he later became Bishop), and established them in a monastery there. For many years they lived the 'angelic life' very fully, and Xenia reposed in peace at an advanced age. At her funeral, a luminous cross appeared in the sky over the procession, following the burial party and disappearing only when the Saint's body was buried.

Apolytikion

The image of God, was faithfully preserved in you, O Mother. For you took up the Cross and followed Christ. By Your actions you taught us to look beyond the flesh for it passes, rather to be concerned about the soul which is immortal. Wherefore, O Holy Xenia, your soul rejoices with the angels.

Our Holy Father Macedonian (ca. 430)

He lived in asceticism in the wild hills outside Antioch. For forty-five years he had no tent or house of any kind, but wandered from place to place, living in caves or in clefts. In his old age, his disciples finally prevailed on him to build a small hut. Altogether he spent seventy years living in solitary ascesis.

Once a hunter met the recluse and asked him what he did in the mountains. The Saint answered 'Like you, I have come to the mountain to

hunt. I am hunting for God, whom I long to see. I ardently desire to catch Him and will never tire of so excellent a chase!'

Once the people of Antioch rioted and tore down a pair of statues of the Emperor Theodosius and his wife. Two generals came from Constantinople, planning to inflict a bloody punishment on the people. Saint Macedonian, learning of this, came to the city and sought out the generals, asking them to take a message to the Emperor: that he, being human and subject to weakness like all men, should not be immoderately angry with other men; and that he should not, in return for the destruction of lifeless images, destroy those who are the very image of God.

During his lifetime Saint Macedonian was granted the gifts of spiritual insight and wonderworking, by which he worked many miracles of healing for the people of Antioch and its surroundings. He reposed in peace around 430, and was buried with honor in Antioch.

Holy Hieromartyr Babylas of Sicily and his Disciples Timothy and Agapius
Martyr John of Kazan

Day 24-Jan-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Ephesians 2:19-3:7; Mark 11:11-23

19 And so, you are no longer strangers and foreigners! Instead, you are fellow-citizens with the saints, and members of God's household,
20 being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.
Christ Jesus himself is the chief cornerstone; 21in whom the whole building, fitted together, grows into a holy sanctuary in the Lord.
22 In Christ, you too are built up into a dwelling-place of God in [the] Spirit.
3 Paul's commission and prayer For this reason, I, Paul, am the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles!
2 Surely, you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given me toward you; 3how by revelation, the mystery was made known to me, as I wrote before in a few words.
4 When you read them, you can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ, 5 which in other generations was not made known to anyone as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit.
6 I mean that the Gentiles are [now] fellow-heirs and fellow-members of the body, yes, fellow-partakers of God's promise in Christ Jesus through the Good News.
7 Of this Good News, I was made a servant, according to the gift of God's grace which was given me according to the working of his power.

Gospel Reading:

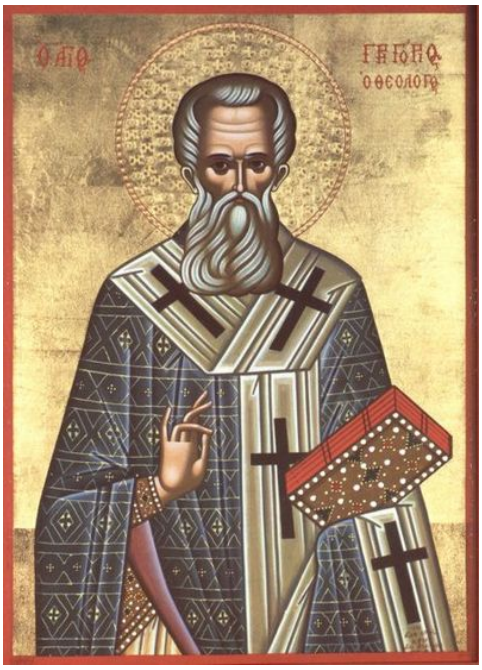
11 Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple.
After looking around at everything, since it was now evening, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.
The cursing of the fig tree – The cleansing of the temple 12 The next day, as they were coming out from Bethany, Jesus was hungry.
13 Seeing in the distance a fig tree with leaves, he came to see if perhaps, he might find something on it.
When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs.
14 Jesus then said to the tree, 'May no one ever eat fruit from you again!' and his disciples heard it.
15 They arrived in Jerusalem and Jesus entered into the temple.
He began to drive out those who did business in the temple and he overthrew the tables of the money changers, as well as the seats of those who sold doves.
16 He would not allow anyone to carry a container through the temple.

17 He taught them, saying, 'Is it not written, 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations?' But you have made it a den of thieves!'
18 When the chief priests and the scribes heard this, they considered how they might destroy him.
As it is, they feared Jesus,a because the crowd was astonished at his teaching.
19 When evening came, he left the city.
20 As they passed by in the morning, the disciples saw the fig tree withered from the roots.
21 Remembering [what had happened], Peter said to him, 'Rabbi, look! The fig tree which you cursed has withered away!'
22 Jesus answered them, 'Have faith in God! 23 For amen, I tell you that if anyone tells this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' without doubt in the heart but believing that what he says is happening; he shall have whatever he says.

Day 25-Jan-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Our Father among the Saints Gregory the Theologian, Archbishop of Constantinople (389)



This light of the Church is one of only three holy Fathers whom the Church has honored with the name "the Theologian" (the others are St John the Evangelist and Theologian, and St Symeon the New Theologian).

He was born in 329 in Arianzus in Cappadocia to a pious and holy family: both his father Gregory, mother Nonna, brother Caesarius and sister Gorgonia are all counted among the Saints of the Church. His father later became Bishop of Nazianzus. He studied in Palestine, then in Alexandria, then in Athens. On the way to Athens, his ship was almost sunk in a violent storm; Gregory, who had not yet been baptized, prayed to the Lord to preserve him, and promised that henceforth he would dedicate his entire life to God. Immediately the storm ceased.

In Athens, Gregory's fellow students included St Basil the Great and the future Emperor Julian the Apostate. The friendship between Gregory and Basil blossomed into a true spiritual friendship; they were loving brothers in Christ for the rest of their lives. After completing their studies, Sts Gregory and Basil lived together as monks in hermitage at Pontus. Much against St Gregory's will, his father ordained him a priest, and St Basil consecrated him Bishop of Sasima (in the Archdiocese of Caesarea, over which St Basil was Archbishop).

In 381 the Second Ecumenical Council condemned Macedonius, Archbishop of Constantinople, and appointed St Gregory in his place. When he arrived in the City, he found that the Arians controlled all the churches, and he was forced to "rule" from a small house chapel. From there he preached his five great sermons on the Trinity, the Triadika; these were so powerfully influential that when he left Constantinople two years later, every church in the City had been restored to the Orthodox.

St Gregory was always a theologian and a contemplative, not an administrator, and the duties of Archbishop were agonizing to him. In 382 he

received permission from a council of his fellow-bishops and the Emperor to retire from the see of Constantinople. He returned to Nazianzus (for which reason he is sometimes called St Gregory of Nazianzus). There he reposed in peace in 391 at the age of sixty-two.

His writings show a theological depth and a sublimity of expression perhaps unsurpassed in the Church. His teaching on the Holy Trinity is a great bastion of Orthodox Faith; in almost every one of his published homilies he preaches the Trinity undivided and of one essence.

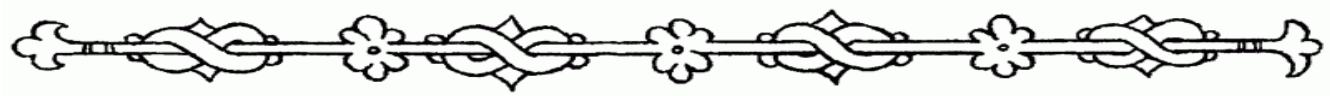
Apolytikion

The pastoral flute of your theology conquered the trumpets of orators. For it called upon the depths of the Spirit and you were enriched with the beauty of words. Intercede to Christ our God, O Father Gregory, that our souls may be saved.

Kontakion

O Glorious One, you dispelled the complexities of orators with the words of your theology. You have adorned the Church with the vesture of Orthodoxy woven from on high. Clothed in this, the Church now cries out to your children, with us, “Hail Father, the consummate theological mind.”

Venerable Father Mares of Syria
Venerable Publius, the Ascetic of Syria
Holy Martyr Felicitas and her Seven Sons



Day 25-Jan-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Readings of the day: Ephesians 3:8-21; Mark 11:23-26

8 This grace was given to me, the very least of all saints, so that I might preach to
the Gentiles the unsearchable treasures of Christ 9 and make everyone see the
dispensation of the mystery which had been hidden in God for so long, in him who
created all things through Jesus Christ.
10 This happened so that now, through the Church, the manifold wisdom of God
might be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places,
11 according to the eternal purpose which God had in Christ Jesus our Lord.
12 In him, we have boldness and confident access through our faith in him.
13 Therefore, I ask that you may not lose heart because of my troubles for you, as
they are your glory!
14 And so, I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,
16 asking that according to the riches of his glory, he would grant you to be
inwardly strengthened with power through his Spirit.
17 I also pray that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, so that you may
be rooted and grounded in love.
18 May you [thus] be strengthened to comprehend with all the saints what is the
breadth and length and height and depth 19 of Christ's love which is beyond
knowledge; and that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.
20 Now, to him who is able to accomplish much more than all we can ask or think
according to the power that works in us, 21 to him be the glory in the Church and
in Christ Jesus to all generations, now and forerever and unto ages of ages.
Amen.

Gospel Reading:

23 For amen, I tell you that if anyone tells this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into
the sea, without doubt in the heart but believing that what he says is happening; he
shall have whatever he says.
24 Therefore, I tell you, whatever things you pray for and ask for, believe that you
have received them, and you shall have them.
25 Whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive; so
that your Father who is in heaven may also forgive your transgressions.
26 But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions.

Day 26-Jan-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Our Holy Father Xenophon, his wife Mary and their sons Arcadius and John (6th c.)

Xenophon was a wealthy senator in Constantinople during the reign of Justinian. He and his wife Mary had two sons, Arcadius and John, to whom they gave every advantage of education. When they were of age, Xenophon sent them both to study law in Berytus (Beirut). But the ship on which they set out was wrecked in a storm, and the two brothers were cast ashore, alive but separated, neither knowing whether the other had survived.

Both brothers gave thanks to God for their salvation and, newly conscious of the vanity of earthly things, both became monks: John in Tyre and Arcadius in Jerusalem. Two years later, having heard no news from his sons, Xenophon made inquiries and found that they had never arrived at Beirut, and that they had seemingly perished in a shipwreck. Giving thanks to God, who gives and takes away, both Xenophon and his wife Mary put on coarse garments and went on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. In Jerusalem, they met the spiritual father of Arcadius, who told them that both their sons were alive and that they would soon see them.

By God's providence, John and Arcadius met one another at Golgotha and, joyfully reunited, spent some time serving Arcadius' holy Elder. Two days later Xenophon and Mary, visiting the Elder, spent time with their two sons but did not recognize them until the Elder revealed their identity. The parents wept for joy and decided immediately to take up the monastic life themselves. Giving away their considerable wealth, the two entered monasteries in the Holy Land. Both parents and sons went far in the life of prayer, being granted the power to work miracles and foreknow future events.

St Ammonas of Egypt, disciple of St Anthony the Great (350)

"Saint Ammonas was a disciple of Saint Antony the Great and became his successor at the head of the hermits of the outer mountain of Pispir, after having spent fourteen years at Scetis in ceaseless prayer to the Lord to be granted victory over anger. He was afterwards consecrated bishop, probably by Saint Athanasius the Great. He possessed impassibility to the extent of being as though ignorant of the existence of evil, and incapable of passing judgment on anyone.

"One day some people came to ask him to settle a difference among them. The Saint responded by pretending to be insane, and answered a woman who treated him as a madman: 'You don't realize how much trouble I've given

myself in the desert to acquire this madness and I have lost it today because of you!' On another occasion when he was taken to visit a brother with a bad reputation, he sat on the barrel where [the erring brother's] concubine was hiding while his accusers searched his cell in vain. Then, taking his leave of the unfortunate man, he simply said: 'Brother, have a care for yourself!'

"When he was asked which deeds of ascesis are most pleasing to God, he replied: 'Just sit in your cell and eat a little every day, always keeping the prayer of the Publican in your heart (Luke 18:13), and you can be saved.' He also said that the fear of God begets moans and tears and these cause joy to arise in the soul, filling it with divine strength to do what is pleasing to God, and that this power from on high establishes us in the company of the Angels. Raised thus from height to height as we humbly pray to be delivered from sin, we shall (he said) receive as if of itself, revelation of the mysteries of God." (Synaxarion)

Our Holy Mother Paula of Rome (404)

She was born in 347 to a noble family in Rome, and at age sixteen married Toxotius, a prominent nobleman. Though her husband was a pagan, he was devoted to her and gave her freedom to keep a Christian home and rear her children as Christians. They were blessed with five children. When she was thirty-two her husband died suddenly, and Paula resolved to turn her large house in Rome into a monastery. Later she traveled to the Holy Land with her spiritual father St Jerome (June 15). In Bethlehem she established two monasteries, one for women (where she dwelt) and one for St Jerome and his companions. Every day the nuns chanted the entire Psalter, which they were required to learn by heart. Paula was exceptionally austere in her fasting and lavish in her almsgiving, often giving away to the poor even the goods needed by her community for subsistence. She aided her spiritual father and brother Jerome in his controversies with Origen's followers: St Jerome himself was hot-tempered, and St Paula often exhorted him to confront his enemies with patience and humility.

When she was fifty-six years old, she felt her death approaching, and heard Christ say to her 'Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away; for lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone' (Song of Songs 2:10-11). To this she replied 'The time of harvest has come. I shall truly see the good things of the Lord in the land of the living,' and gave up her soul joyfully. Her funeral was attended by throngs of monks, nuns and poor people, all of whom revered her as their mother and benefactress.

Venerable Symeon the Ancient of Mount Sinai

Saint David the Restorer, King of Georgia

Day 26-Jan-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Ephesians 4:14-19; Mark 11:27-33

14 The goal is that we may no longer be children, tossed back and forth and carried about by every wind of doctrine through human trickery, according to clever deceits and mistaken schemes.
15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, may we grow up in all things into him who is the head, Christ.
16 From him, the whole body, being fitted and knit together, as every joint supplies and according to the participation of each part, grows and builds itself in love.
A new way of life 17 Therefore, I say and testify in the Lord that you [should] no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind.
18 They are darkened in their understanding, cut off from God's life because of their ignorance and because of the hardening of their hearts.
19 Having become hardened, such people gave themselves up to lust and they pursue what is impure with greed.

Gospel Reading:

27 They returned to Jerusalem, and as Jesus was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the presbyters came to him.
28 They began to ask him, 'By what authority do you do these things? Who gave you the authority to do such things?' 29 Jesus replied, 'I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things.
30 The baptism of John- was it from heaven, or from men? Answer me.
31 They debated among themselves, saying, 'If we say, 'From heaven' he will reply, 'Why then did you not believe him?' 32 But dare we say, 'From men?'" They feared the people, for all considered that John was indeed a prophet.
33 They answered Jesus, 'We do not know!' Jesus said to them, 'Then neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things.

Day 27-Jan-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Translation of the relics (437) of St John Chrysostom.

In the year after the Saint's repose both the Emperor Arcadius and his wife Eudoxia, who had been most responsible for St John's exile, died. Their son Theodosius II succeeded to the throne. Soon most of the exiled supporters of St John were restored to their sees. In 434 St Proclus, a disciple of St John Chrysostom, was made Archbishop of Constantinople, and persuaded the Emperor to have St John's relics solemnly translated from Comana to Constantinople. But all efforts to disinter his remains failed, as if his coffin were sealed in the earth. Learning of this, the Emperor wrote a letter to St John asking forgiveness for his father's persecution, and pleading with him to agree to return to the Imperial City for the benefit of the faithful. As soon as this letter was placed over the Saint's tomb, his coffin was removed with no difficulty and conveyed solemnly to Constantinople.

When the cortege reached Constantinople, the Emperor met it and prostrated himself before it, once again begging the Saint's forgiveness for the sins of the State against him. At last, the relics were deposited beneath the altar of the Church of the Holy Apostles, where they worked many miracles during the celebration of the Liturgy. Since then, the relics have been scattered throughout the world, where they never fail to reveal the Saint's loving presence.

Apolytikion

The grace of your words illuminated the universe like a shining beacon. It amassed treasures of munificence in the world. It demonstrated the greatness of humility, teaching us by your own words; therefore, O Father John Chrysostom, intercede to Christ the Logos for the salvation of our souls.

Saint Peter of Egypt
Demetrios the New Martyr of Constantinople
Venerable Titus of the Monastery of the Kiev Caves

Day 27-Jan-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Ephesians 4:17-25; Mark 12:1-12
17 Therefore, I say and testify in the Lord that you [should] no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind.
18 They are darkened in their understanding, cut off from God's life because of their ignorance and because of the hardening of their hearts.
19 Having become hardened, such people gave themselves up to lust and they pursue what is impure with greed.
20 But you did not learn Christ that way, 21 except if you failed to hear him and to be taught in him, since truth is in Jesus.
22 You were [supposed] to put away the old self which belongs to your former way of life, since it becomes ever more corrupt after the lusts of deceit.
23 Moreover, you are to be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and to put on the new self who in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of truth.
25 Therefore, putting away what is false, speak the truth to each other, for we are members of one another.
Gospel reading:

12 The parable of the tenant farmers of the vineyard He began to speak to them in parables.
'A man planted a vineyard, put a hedge around it, dug a pit for the winepress, and built a tower.
He then rented it to tenant farmers and left for another country.
2 When it was time, he sent a servant to the farmers to receive his share of the fruit of the vineyard.
3But they took the servant, beat him, and sent him away empty.
4 Again, the owner sent another servant to them, and they threw stones at him, wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully treated.
5Again he sent another; and they killed him along with many others, beating some, and killing some.
6 The man still had one left to send, his beloved son.
Finally, he sent him to them, saying: 'They will respect my son!' 7 But the tenants of the vineyard said among themselves, 'This is the heir! Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours!' 8 They took him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.
9 What then will the lord of the vineyard do? He will come to destroy the farmers,

and he will give the vineyard to others.
10 Have you not even read this Scripture: 'The very stone which the builders rejected, Has become the head of the corner.
11 This is the Lord's doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes?' The question of paying taxes to Caesar 12 They kept trying to arrest Jesus, but they feared the multitude because they understood that he had spoken the parable against them. So they left him and went away.

Day 28-Jan-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Saint Isaac the Syrian, Bishop of Ninevah

Today we commemorate two shining stars of the life of prayer and stillness, both of them Syrians.
Our Holy Father Ephraim the Syrian (373)
He is often called "The Harp of the Holy Spirit" for the sublimity of his writings. He was born in Nisibis of Mesopotamia about the year 306. He embraced the Christian faith while young and for this was driven from his home by his father, a pagan priest. He came under the care of St James of Nisibis (January 13), who was one of the bishops at the Council of Nicaea. He took up a strictly ascetical life, renouncing all possessions and denying himself all comforts. It is said that his eyes constantly flowed with tears: tears of compunction for his own sins, or tears of joy as he contemplated the wonders of God's grace.

He was baptized at the age of twenty and withdrew to the desert, then settled in Edessa. Once, as he was walking to the city, a harlot approached him. Pretending to accept her proposition, he took her to the city's public square and suggested that they lie together there, in plain view. Horrified, the woman rebuked him, saying 'Have you no shame?' The Saint answered, 'Poor woman, you are afraid of being watched by other people; but why are you not afraid of being seen by God, who sees everything and, on the last day, will judge all our actions and most secret thoughts?' The woman repented and, with the Saint's help, embarked upon a new life.

The Saint returned to the desert for a time, then to Nisibis to aid the Persian Christians, persecuted because they were seen as allies of the Romans. When Nisibis finally fell under Persian rule, St Ephraim and his spiritual father St James both settled in Edessa. At that time Edessa was troubled by the gnostic heretic Bardaisan, one of whose devices was to compose attractive hymns, which became popular and enticed many away from the truth. Taking up Bardaisan's own weapons, St Ephraim composed a number of hymns, beautiful in word and melody, which poetically set forth the

true Faith.

Hearing of the sanctity of St Basil the Great, St Ephraim traveled to Cappadocia to meet him. It is recorded that at their first meeting, St Basil greeted him: 'Art thou the Ephraim who hath beautifully bended his neck and taken upon himself the yoke of the saving Word?'; to which St Ephraim replied, 'I am Ephraim who hinder myself from traveling the way to heaven.' After discoursing with the Syrian Saint for some time, St Basil cried out 'O, if only I had thy sins!' Basil then ordained St Ephraim to the diaconate. He would have ordained him a priest but St Ephraim, feeling unworthy, refused to be ordained, then and for the rest of his life.

The Saint returned to a life of solitude; but when a famine broke out in Edessa in 372, he came forth to rebuke the wealthy for failing to share their wealth with the poor. Some replied that they knew no one whom they could trust with their goods, so St Ephraim persuaded them to give their alms to him for distribution to the poor. A true deacon, he cared for the sick with his own hands. The following year, he reposed in peace.

St Ephraim was the first to use hymnody and song to express the teaching of the Church, and so might be called the Church's first hymnographer. His works were probably an inspiration to St Romanos the Melodist, also a Syrian. He is said to have written more than three million lines of verse in Syriac, in addition to many homilies and treatises. Only a fraction of his work has been translated.

A beautiful selection of St Ephraim's writings can be found in A Spiritual Psalter, a collection edited by St Theophan the Recluse, available in English.

Apolytikion

With the rivers of your tears, you have made the barren desert fertile. Through sighs of sorrow from deep within you, your labors have borne fruit a hundred-fold. By your miracles you have become a light, shining upon the world. O Ephraim, our Holy Father, pray to Christ our God, to save our souls.

Kontakion

At all times didst thou foresee the hour of reckoning, and pricked in thy heart, thou ever didst lament with tears; and, O righteous Ephraim, thou wast a mighty teacher in works and deeds. Hence, O Father for all the world, thou didst rouse the slothful unto change of heart.

Our Holy Father Isaac the Syrian, bishop of Nineveh (7th c.)

He was born early in the seventh century in the East. His birthplace is unclear: the Great Horologion says that he was born in eastern Arabia (present-day Qatar); the Synaxarion that he was born in Kurdistan. While still young he entered the Lavra of St Matthew with his brother, but after a few years of

monastic life, having advanced far in obedience and the practice of prayer, he withdrew into the desert. His reputation for holiness reached the city of Nineveh, where the people prevailed on the hierarchy to consecrate him as their bishop in 670. Reluctantly but obediently, St Isaac took up the duties of shepherd of his flock in Nineveh. After a few months, he was called on to settle a dispute between two of the faithful, but they rejected his counsel and said 'Leave your Gospel out of this matter!' The holy bishop said, 'If they are not prepared to obey Our Lord's commandments, what need have they of me?', and retired to live as a hermit in the mountains of Kurdistan. Later, he settled in the monastery of Raban Shapur, where he wrote his Ascetical Homilies and other jewel-like works on the spiritual life. There he reposed in peace.

The fame of St Isaac' Homilies spread, and about one hundred years after their writing they were translated from Syriac into Greek by two monks in Palestine. In this form they spread throughout the monastic world, becoming a treasured guide to those who seek the fullness of the life of prayer. The Synaxarion says, "The book of Saint Isaac is, with the Ladder of Saint John Climacus, the indispensible guide for every Orthdox soul to journey safely toward God. Hence, not many years ago, a holy spiritual father, Jerome of Egina (d. 1966), recommended begging, if necessary, in order to be able to purchase a copy." We are blessed to have a good translation of the Ascetical Homilies available in English.

Saint Isaac is a very unusual case of an Orthodox Saint who lived outside the canonical boundaries of the Church: he was a bishop of the "Nestorian" communion, now sometimes called the "Oriental Orthodox." The purity of his own Orthodox faith is so clearly evident in his writings that the Church has nonetheless recognized his sanctity.

Venerable Palladius, Hermit of Syria

Saint James the Ascetic

Venerable Ephraim of the Monastery of the Kiev Caves

Day 28-Jan-2023 Saturday

Fast Free
Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 14:20-25; Matthew 25:1-13
20 Brethren, do not be children in thoughts, yet be infants when it comes to evil. Be mature in your thoughts.
21It is written in the law: By men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers, I will speak to this people.
Yet, not even thus will they hear me, says the Lord.
22 Therefore, other tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers.
Prophesying is [also] a sign, not to the unbelieving, but to those who believe.
23 If therefore the whole Church is assembled and all speak in tongues, and someone untaught or unbelieving comes in, will this person not say that you are crazy? 24 But if all prophesy, and someone unbelieving or untaught comes in, that person is reproved by all, and is judged by all.
25 And thus, the secrets of this person's heart shall be revealed in order to fall down on his face and expressed adoration toe God, declaring that God is among you indeed.

Gospel Reading:

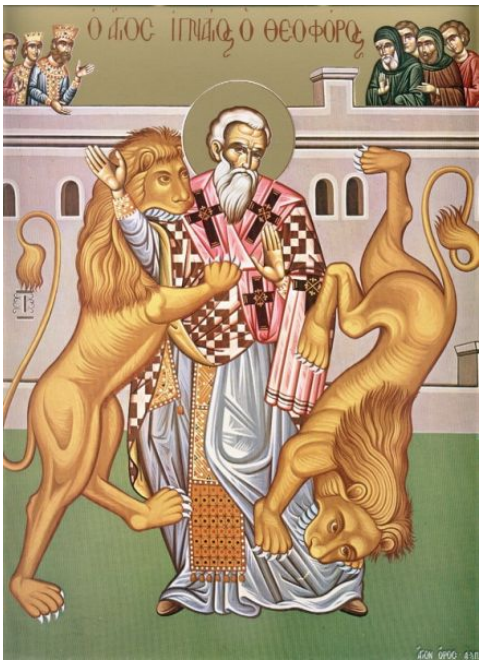
25 'Then, the Kingdom of Heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.
2 Five of them were foolish, and five were wise.
3Those who were foolish took their lamps but brought no oil along with them,
4whereas the wise ones brought oil in their vessels along with their lamps.
5 Now, since the bridegroom was late, they all became tired and fell asleep.
6 But at midnight there was a cry, 'Behold! The bridegroom is coming! Come out to meet him!' 7 Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps.
8 The foolish virgins said to the wise ones, 'Give us some of your oil because our lamps are going out.
9 But the wise virgins answered: 'What if there is not enough for us and you? You should rather go to those who sell [oil] and buy some for yourselves.
10 While they went away to buy [oil], the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and then the door was shut.
11 Afterwards, the other virgins also arrived and said: 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' 12

But he answered, 'Amen, I tell you that I do not know you!' 13 Watch therefore, for you do not know the day or the hour

Day 29-Jan-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Translation of the relics of St Ignatius of Antioch (107)



For his life, see December 20.

After his martyrdom, devoured by wild beasts in the amphitheater in Rome, only a few bones remained. These precious relics were gathered by the faithful, who took them back to Antioch, where they were received with joy by his former flock.

St Andrei Rublev, iconographer (1430)

Many consider him the greatest iconographer of all time, and his "Holy Trinity" the finest icon. Very little is known of his life. He was born around 1360, and probably studied with the Byzantine iconographer Theophanes the Greek. He is known to have created icons for the Cathedral of the Annunciation in Moscow and the Cathedral of the Dormition at Vladimir. He created a highly spiritual and distinctively Russian iconographic style that set the standard for Russian iconography for centuries thereafter. It is said that he knew St Sergius of Radonezh (July 5). In his later years he became a monk.

Our Holy Father Aphrahat the Persian (4th c.)

He was from the pagan Persian aristocracy, but came to faith in Christ and left his home for the Christian city of Edessa, where he was baptized. He later moved to Antioch, where he lived in prayer and asceticism a short distance from the city. He ate nothing but a small amount of bread until he was extremely old, when he added some greens to his diet. Though he knew very little Greek, he was empowered by the Holy Spirit to win many converts to Christ and to confound the learned Arian heretics who were disturbing the Church in Antioch.

When Aphrahat learned that the Arian Emperor Valens was persecuting Christ's Church, he moved to the city to support the true Faith. One day the Emperor himself met Aphrahat in the city square and asked him why he had left his solitude and come to Antioch. The Saint answered 'Tell me this: if I were a maiden at home in my secluded apartment and saw someone setting fire to my father's house, would you not advise me to put out the blaze as soon as possible? That is what I am doing now, because the Church, the

heavenly Father's house, is burning down inthe fire that you have set!' One of the Emperor's attendants threatened Aphrahat with death for this impertinence; but the attendant himself later perished, drowned as he was heating water for the Emperor's bath. This made the Emperor afraid to persecute the holy one, who continued to preach the true Faith and to perform many miracles. He reposed in peace.

Venerable Laurence the Recluse of the Kiev Caves

Seven Martyrs at Samosata: Romanos, Iakovos, Philotheos, Hyerechios, Habib, Julian and Paregorios

Day 29-Jan-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Sunday of the Canaanite Woman
2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1; Matthew 15:21-28
16 What agreement can there be between God's sanctuary and idols? For you are
a sanctuary of the living God.
Even as God said, 'I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God,
and they will be my people.
17 Therefore: 'Come out from among them and be separate,' says the Lord.
'Touch no unclean thing.
I will receive you.
I will be a Father to you.
You will be to me sons and daughters,' says the Lord Almighty.
7 Since we have these promises, beloved, let us purify ourselves from all
defilement of flesh and spirit, so that we may bring [our] holiness to completion in
the fear of God

Gospel Reading: Sunday of the Canaanite Woman

21 Jesus then left that area
and withdrew into the region
of Tyre and Sidon.
22 Behold, a Canaanite
woman came out from those
borders and cried out, 'Have
mercy on me, Lord, you son
of David! My daughter is
severely demonized!' 23 But
Jesus did not answer her a
word.
His disciples came and
begged him, saying, 'Send
her away! She is shouting
after us!' 24 However, Jesus
answered, 'I was not sent to
anyone but the lost sheep of the house of Israel.
25 Still, the woman came forward and expressed adoration to him, saying, 'Lord,

help me.
26 But he answered, 'It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs.
27 But she replied, 'Yes, Lord, but even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.
28 Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be it done to you even as you desire.
And her daughter was healed from that hour.

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING
Today, we commemorate the miracle done to the possessed daughter of the Canaanite woman.
The gospel shows us another example of great faith coming from a Canaanite woman who did not have the true faith that the Jewish people had.
She puts to shame those who think they know the true God and yet do not try to imitate Him, because in essence they do not know God.
Since God is love and we do not love with completeness, we cannot say that we know God.
Since the Son of God became Man and humbled Himself, even to death on the Cross, we can't say that we know humility.
So, we cannot say that we truly know the Son of God.
If our prayers are to be fruitful, they must be joined with morality and to reach perfection.
We cannot know Him, or bear to be in His presence unless we struggle for perfection.
So that is the first and foremost thing.
Even when our Lord called her a dog by saying, 'It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs.
' (Matt. 15: 26), which means that he called her an unwashed, pagan unbeliever, in other words, a non-Jew, she still plucked up the courage in humility to say something very profound. She replied to the Lord, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.' (Matt. 15: 27) by hearing God's words and mixing them with humility.
God in the flesh responded to her and said, 'O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.' (Matt. 15: 28). And then her daughter was healed immediately.
She showed the way to pray to God with humility, persistence, her knowledge of God and simplicity to have her daughter healed from the demon that possessed her.
Her acceptance by Christ also points to the gathering of the Gentiles into the Church after Pentecost (in 33 AD) as children of God and not seen as dogs anymore who are invited to eat the bread of eternal life (Holy Communion) and not crumbs from the master’s table.

We also see in this story, that Christ does not look for faith from the daughter; in the same way, he does not look for faith from the daughter of the centurion (Matt. 9: 18-26) nor for faith from the daughter of the servant (Matt. 8: 6-13). He looks only for the faith of the one who intercedes.
Christ answers when He is satisfied with the faith of those who approach Him on the behalf of those who need healing May God help us to pray and have faith like the woman of Canaan.
Amen!

Day 30-Jan-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

† Synaxis of the Three Holy Hierarchs: St Basil the Great, St Gregory the Theologian, and St John Chrysostom

This feast was instituted during the reign of Alexis I Comnenus (1081 1118). A dispute arose in Constantinople among various prominent citizens and clergy, about which of the three Fathers Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, or St John Chrysostom was the greatest. In typically Byzantine fashion, the people of the City joined into the dispute, which became more animated, dividing the populace into three hostile factions styling themselves Basilians, Gregorians and Joannites. At last, desiring to restore peace to the City and the Church, the three holy hierarchs themselves appeared to the monk John Mauropus; they revealed to him that they stand together in harmony and in equal glory before the heavenly throne, and instructed him to compose a common service for the three of them. Saint John (Mauropus) obeyed, and chose January 30 as the date of the commemoration, since each of the three hierarchs is commemorated separately in January.

Apolytikion

The three most great luminaries of the Three-Sun Divinity have illumined all of the world with the rays of doctrines divine and true; they are the sweetly-flowing rivers of wisdom, who with godly knowledge have watered all creation in clear and mighty streams: The great and sacred Basil, and the Theologian, wise Gregory, together with the renowned John, the famed Chrysostom of golden speech. Let us all who love their divinely-wise words come together, honouring them with hymns; for ceaselessly they offer entreaty for us to the Trinity.

Kontakion

Receive, O Lord, the Sacred Heralds who preached God, the pinnacle of Teachers, unto the enjoyment of Your riches and rest. You have received their labors and their suffering as being above and beyond all fruitful offering. For You alone glorify Your Saints.

Saint Peter, King of Bulgaria (970)

"Saint Peter was a humble, devout and peace-loving man, unlike his father, Tsar Symeon the Warrior (d. 927), during whose reign there had been perpetual warfare. By contrast, Peter's long reign was peaceful, and notable for the restoration of good relations with Byzantium and with the West. Peter married Maria, the grand-daughter of the Emperor Romanus Lecapenus, who recognized him as basileus (tsar or king), and he obtained independence from Constantinople for the Bulgarian Church with its own Patriarch. He had a great love for Saint John of Rila (19 Oct.), whom he would often consult, and he kept in touch with renowned ascetics of the time like Saint Paul of Latros (15 Dec.). The King acted energetically against the Bogomil heresy, an offshoot of Manicheism, by which some of his people, lacking sufficient instruction in the faith, were being misled. He called a council in order to condemn the heresy and reassert Christian principles. Nevertheless, the infection was to remain active for many years in Bulgaria. Following the invasion of the north of his Kingdom by Prince Svyatoslav of Kiev in 969, Peter abdicated and became a monk. He died in the following year, having consecrated his final days to God alone." (Synaxarion)

A note on the Bogomils: The Bogomils flourished in the Eastern Europe as an organized church from the 10th to the 15th century. In theology they were dualistic, incorporating some Manichean and Gnostic ideas from the Paulicians. They were nationalistic and gained much support through their opposition to Byzantine dominance over the Slavic peoples. They disappeared as an organized body around the fifteenth century, but elements of their beliefs persisted in popular thinking for many centuries afterward.

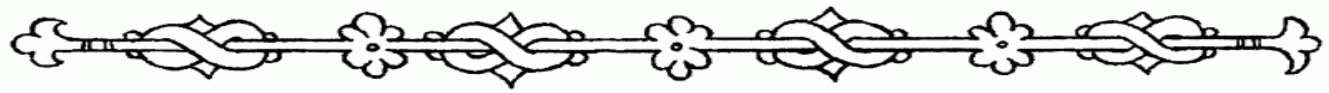
Hieromartyr Hippolytus, Bishop of Rome, and his Companions
Holy Martyr Theophilus the New
Icon of the Mother of God 'Tinos"

Day 30-Jan-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 1 Peter 2:21-3:9; Mark 12:13-17
21.
You were called to this, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving usb an example so that you should follow in his steps.
22 Yet, he did not sin, 'neither was deceit found in his mouth' 23 and when he was cursed, he did not curse back.
When he suffered, he did not threaten but committed himself to the one who judges righteously.
24 In his body, he bore in himself our sins on the tree, so that having died to sins, we might live to righteousness; and 'by his stripes you were healed'.
d 25 Indeed, you were going astray like sheep, but now, you have returned to the shepherd and overseere of your souls.
1 In the same way, wives, be in subjection to your own husbands.
This way, even if they do not obey the word, they might be won by the behavior of their wives without a word, 2seeing your pure and reverent attitude.
3Your beauty should not only consist in external ornaments and hairstyles, golden jewelry or fine clothing.
4Instead, let it be in the hidden person of the heart, in the incorruptible adornment of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.
5This is how the holy women of the past hoped in God and also adorned themselves.
They were submissive to their own husbands, 6 as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him 'lord.
You are now her children if you do what is good and do not give in to fear.
7 In the same way, you husbands should live with your wives according to knowledge, giving them honor as to the weaker vessel and also as jointheirs of the grace of life.
This way, your prayers will not be hindered.
8 Finally, be all like-minded, compassionate, loving as brethren, tenderhearted, polite, 9 not giving back evil for evil or insult for insult.
Instead, give back blessing, knowing that you are called to do this, so that you [yourselves] may inherit a blessing.

Gospel Reading:

13 They sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus, in order to trap him
in what he said.
14 They came to him and said, 'Teacher, we know that you are truthful, and that
you are not afraid of anyone because you do not look at human rank but truly
teach the way of God.
Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? 15 Shall we give, or shall we not give?'
But knowing their hypocrisy, Jesus replied, 'Why do you test me? Bring me a
denarius, so that I may see it.
16 They brought it.
Jesus then asked them, 'Whose image and inscription is this?' They answered,
'Caesar's.
17 Jesus then said, 'Renderd to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what
belongs to God.
And they were amazed at him.



Day 31-Jan-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Holy Wonderworkers and Unmercenaries Cyrus and John, and those with them (311)

They are counted among the Unmercenary Physicians. Cyrus was a physician living in Alexandria. A pious Christian, he healed not only bodies but souls, bringing many to Christ, and often healing through prayer rather than the use of his medicines. He often said to his patients, 'If you want to keep clear of illness, take care not to sin, because more often than not illness is a result of sin.' When Diocletian's persecution broke out, Cyrus was denounced to the pagan governor and fled to Arabia, where he became a monk. He gained great renown there by healing many ailments using only the sign of the Cross.

John was a soldier from Edessa who heard of Cyrus' deeds and, leaving the army, sought him out. They met in Egypt, where John became a monk and Cyrus' disciple, joining him in the practice of the virtues and in healing illnesses by prayer.

They heard of the arrest of a Christian lady named Athanasia and her daughters Theoctista and Eudoxia. Concerned that the tender maidens might renounce Christ under torture, the two monks sought them out to encourage them in their confession of the Faith. They themselves were captured, and the governor decided to have them tortured in front of the women, assuming that this would break their spirit. Instead, Cyrus and John bore their sufferings so patiently and boldly that the women were only strengthened in their resolve. Seeing that he had failed, the governor had all five of them beheaded. Their bodies were placed in the Church of St Mark in Alexandria.

In the fifth century the relics of Sts Cyrus and John were enshrined in a church at Aboukir near Alexandria by St Cyril (June 9). There they were the source of abundant healings and miracles, and the shrine became one of the greatest places of pilgrimage in the Christian world.

Venerable Nicetas, hermit of the Kiev Caves and Bishop of Novgorod (1108)

His is a remarkable story of spiritual delusion (prelest in Russian) and repentance of delusion. Nicetas was a young and zealous monk of the Lavra of the Kiev Caves who, against the advice of his abbot St Nikon (March 25), retired alone to a cave and walled himself in. Some time later, the young monk experienced a delightful scent filling his cave. Believing himself to be receiving a divine revelation, he cried out 'Lord, show Thyself to me, that I might worship Thee face to face!' A voice answered, 'I am sending you an angel: do whatever he tells you.' The Devil soon appeared to him as an 'angel of light' and Nicetas, completely taken in, prostrated before him. The Devil ordered him to stop praying and to devote all his time to reading and memorizing the Old Testament. Nicetas obeyed without question. After awhile, the Devil began to reveal to him things that were happening in the outside world, so that the young monk acquired a reputation for prophecy among visitors to his cave. When the Elders of the Caves realized that Nicetas never spoke to his visitors or anyone else of the New Testament, they decided that he was beguiled by the Devil. Breaking down the door of his cave, they drove out the deceiver by their prayers and forcibly took the young hermit back to the monastery.

As soon as the evil angel had been driven off, Nicetas became like a young child: he instantly forgot the entire
Old Testament (which he had virtually memorized) and even lost the ability to read, so that he had to be sent to school again. Slowly he returned to himself, realized his former delusion and repented in tears. Thereafter he devoted himself to humility and obedience in the monastic community. Such was his repentance and progress in the virtues that he was later made Bishop of Novgorod. He reposed in peace in 1108 and became known for working many miracles, especially healing of blindness.

Marcella of Rome (410)

The daughter of a prominent Roman family, she was given in marriage despite her reluctance, but was widowed after less than a year. Following the example of the prophetess Anna, she dedicated her widowhood to God and turned her fine house in Rome into a monastery, living there in strict asceticism.

“When the Church was riven by controversies about the doctrines of Origen, Saint Marcella kept silent for a while but, deciding at length to take up the cause of Orthodoxy, and maintaining a sweet and gentle manner in the exchanges, she succeeded in confounding the arguments of the heretics.” (Ormylia Synaxarion)

When the Goths invaded and pillaged Rome in 410 they broke into her house. Marcella received them calmly, but when they demanded money she answered that no one as poorly clothed as she was could be expected to have any money. At this the invaders beat her mercilessly despite her great age. She bore their blows without complaint, asking only that they spare her spiritual daughter Principia. Struck to the heart by her response, the

barbarians took her and her disciple to the Church of St Paul, where she reposed two days later.

Holy Martyr Tryphaena

Martyrs Athanasia and her daughters Theoctista, Theodora and Eudoxia in Egypt

Our Righteous Father Arsenius of Parus

Day 31-Jan-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: 1 Peter 3:10-22; Mark 12:18-27

10 For: Whoever would love life, and see good days, should keep his tongue from
evil, and his lips from speaking deceit.
Let him turn away from evil, and do good.
Let him seek peace, and pursue it.
For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears open to their prayer;
but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.
a 13 Now, who will harm you, if you become imitators of what is good? 14 But even
if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed.
'Do not fear what they fear, and do not be troubled.
15 Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts and always be ready to give a verbal
defense to everyone who asks you an explanation for the hope that is in you; [and
do so] with humility and fear.
16 Have a good conscience, so that even while some speak against you as
evildoers and curse your good way of life in Christ, they may be put to shame.
17 It is better, if it is God's will, that you should suffer for doing what is good rather
than for doing what is evil.
18 Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, so that he
might bring you to God.
He was put to death in the flesh but [made] alive in [the] spirit.
19 Thus, he also descended and preached to the spirits in prison.
20 In the past, those had been disobedient, when God waited patiently in the days
of Noah, while the ark was being built.
In this ark, a few, (that is eight souls,) were saved through water.
21 This is an antitype of baptism, which now saves you.
Baptism is not the putting away of the impurity of the flesh but the appeal of a good
conscience {in your relationship} toward God through the resurrection of Jesus
Christ.
22 He is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, with angels, authorities
and powers being subject to him.

Gospel Reading:

18 After this, Sadducees (who say that there is no resurrection) came to him.
They asked him, 19 'Teacher, Moses wrote to us, 'If a man dies leaving a wife

behind him but no children, his brother should take his wife, and raise up an offspring for him.
20 There were seven brothers.
The first took a wife, died, and left no offspring.
21 The second [brother] took her and [also] died, leaving no children behind him.
The third likewise; 22 and so the seven [brothers] married her and left no children.
Last of all, the woman also died.
23 In the resurrection, when they rise, whose wife will she be? For the seven [brothers] had her as a wife.
24 Jesus answered them, 'Is this not why you are mistaken, by not knowing the Scriptures or the power of God? 25 For when people {will} rise from the dead, they do not marry nor are given in marriage; instead, they are like angels in heaven.
26 But regarding the fact that the dead are raised, have you not read in the book of Moses (in the passage about the bush), how God spoke to him, saying: 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?' 27 He is not the God of the dead, but of the living! This is why you are greatly misled.

Day 01-Feb-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Forefeast of the Meeting of the Lord
Holy Martyr Tryphon (250)

He was the son of humble, pious parents in Phrygia, and as supported himself keeping geese. At a very early age he was granted the gift of healing illnesses of man and animals, and driving out unclean spirits.

The daughter of the Emperor Gordian (238-244) was possessed by a demon, which no physician or pagan sorcerer had been able to drive away. One day the demon shouted, 'Only Tryphon is able to drive me out!' Gordian sent servants to scour the Empire in search of the unknown healer; eventually their inquiries led them to the teenaged goose-keeper, and they brought him to Rome, where his prayers immediately drove out the demon. The Emperor showered Tryphon with gifts, which he gave away to the poor on his journey homeward.

When the persecution of Christians under Decius (250) broke out, Tryphon was denounced to the regional government as a dangerous promoter of Christianity (though he had continued to live as a humble peasant, his miracles and healings had made him known). His former service to the Emperor was either forgotten or of no account to the governor, who had him viciously tortured, then sent to Nicaea for further interrogation. There, when no torment would persuade him to deny Christ or worship the idols, he was beheaded outside the city gates. His relics were returned to Lampsacus, near his home, where he continued to work many miracles of healing.

Saint Tryphon is especially invoked for the protection of gardens and farmland against locusts, reptiles, and all small pests.

Holy Martyrs Perpetua and Felicity, and those with them at Carthage (203)

Perpetua, Felicity, Saturus, Saturninus, Secundus and Revocatus were all young catechumens living near Carthage. Perpetua was of noble birth; Felicity (Felicitas) was her slave. All were arrested under Emperor Valerian's persecution and sent to Carthage. Perpetua had a young child still at the breast, which she asked to take with her.

The holy martyrs appeared before the tribunal and joyfully received their

sentence of condemnation to be thrown to the wild beasts in the arena. Felicity, who was eight months pregnant, was concerned that her martyrdom might be postponed because of her pregnancy, but at the prayers of her friends, she went into labor three days before the games. As she groaned in labor, a jailer mocked her, telling her that the pain she felt was nothing to the pain that she would feel in the arena. The Saint replied, 'Here I suffer for myself; then there will be Another with me, who will suffer with me; and my sufferings will be for Him!' When she gave birth, she entrusted her newborn child to the care of a Christian couple and prepared for her end.

On the day of the games, the brothers and sisters in Christ entered the arena together. The men were soon killed by the beasts, but Perpetua and Felicity, though mauled, remained alive. The impatient persecutors ordered that they be beheaded. Walking to the center of the arena, the two spiritual sisters exchanged the kiss of peace and gave up their souls to God.

Our Holy Mother Brigid of Kildare (524)

Her name is also spelled Brigit or Bridget; she is considered, equally with St Patrick (March 17), patron of Ireland. She was born in Ulster of a noble Irish family which had been converted by St Patrick. She was uncommonly beautiful, and her father planned to marry her to the King of Ulster. But at the age of sixteen she asked her Lord Jesus Christ to make her unattractive, so that no one would marry her and she could devote herself to Him alone. Soon she lost an eye and was allowed to enter a monastery. On the day that she took monastic vows, she was miraculously healed and her original beauty restored.

Near Dublin she built herself a cell under an oak tree, which was called Kill-dara, or Cell of the Oak. Soon seven other young women joined her and established the monastery of Kill-dara, which in time became the cathedral city of Kildare. The monastery grew rapidly and became a double monastery with both men's and women's settlements, with the Abbess ranking above the Abbot; from it several other monasteries were planted throughout Ireland. (Combined men's and women's monastic communities are virtually unknown in the east, but were common in the golden age of the Irish Church).

The Saint predicted the day of her death and fell asleep in peace in 524, leaving a monastic Rule to govern all the monasteries under her care. During the Middle Ages her veneration spread throughout Europe.

Venerable Peter of Galatia

Anastasius the New Martyr

Day 01-Feb-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 1 Peter 4:1-11; Mark 12:28-37
1 Therefore, as Christ suffered for us in the flesh, equip yourselves with the same mind; for anyone who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.
2 Thus you should no longer live the rest of your time in the flesh for human lusts but to do God's will.
3 Truly, we have spent enough of our past time fulfilling the desires of [non-believing] Gentiles.
a We used to live in indecency, lusts, excess drinking, orgies, riotous behavior and abominable idolatries.
4 They think it is strange that you no longer run with them into the same abusive lifestyle, and they speak evil of you.
5 However, they will give an account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead! 6 For this reason, the Good News was preached even to the dead, so that they might in the flesh undergo the judgment that faces all human beings but [then] live in the spirit as to God.
7 The end of all things is near! Therefore, be clear-minded, self-controlled and sober in prayer.
8 Above all things, be committed to your mutual love because love covers a multitude of sins.
9 Be hospitable to one another, without grumbling.
10 As each has received a gift, use it to serve each other, as good stewards of the grace of God in its various forms.
11 If anyone speaks, let it be as the very words of God.
If anyone serves, let it be with the strength that God supplies, so that in all things, God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion unto ages of ages.
Amen.

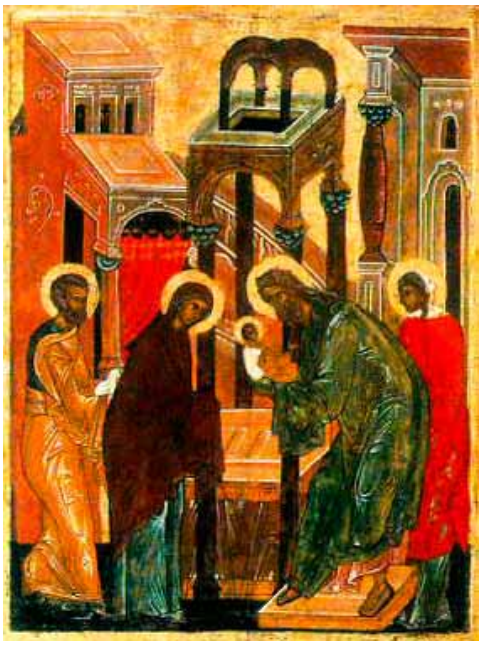
Gospel Reading:
28 One of the scribes came and heard them debating.
Knowing that Jesus had answered them well, he asked him, 'Which commandment is the greatest of all?' 29 Jesus answered, 'The greatest is, 'Hear, Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one: 30 you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.

This is the first commandment.
31 The second is likewise, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.
There is no other commandment greater than these.
32 The scribe said to him, 'It is well, teacher, that you have said truly that he is one, and there is none other but he, 33 and to love him with the whole heart, with the whole mind, with the whole soul, and with the whole strength; and to love one's neighbor as oneself.
It is more important than any whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices.
34 When Jesus saw that the scribe had answered wisely, he said to him, 'You are not far from the Kingdom of God!' No one dared to ask him any [other] question after that 35 As he taught in the temple, Jesus asked, 'How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David? 36 For David himself said in the Holy Spirit:
The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies the footstool of your feet.
c 37 Therefore, David himself calls him Lord, so how can he be his son?' The large crowd listened to him with delight.

Day 02-Feb-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

The Meeting of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ



When the ever-virgin Mary's forty days of purification were passed, according to the Law of Moses she took her son Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem, to dedicate him to God as her first-born son. At the temple the Lord's parents offered the sacrifice of a pair of doves (Luke 2:22-23), from which we learn that they were poor, since those who were able were required to offer a lamb. At the Temple, the Lord was met by Zacharias, father of St John the Baptist, and by the aged, righteous Symeon, who had awaited the salvation of God for many years. (Sts Symeon and Anna are commemorated tomorrow.) We are told that some Pharisees, seeing the child Jesus recognized as the Messiah of Israel, were enraged, and went to tell King Herod. Realizing that this must be the child of whom he had been warned, Herod immediately sent soldiers to kill Him. But the righteous Joseph, warned in dream, fled with the child and his wife, the most holy Theotokos, into Egypt, and they were preserved.

The Feast of the Meeting of the Lord was observed in Jerusalem at least from the fourth century. Its observance was brought to Constantinople by the Emperor Justinian in 542. In the West it is called the Feast of the Purification of the Mother of God, or Candlemas Day.

Epistle Reading: St. Paul’s Letter to the Hebrews 7:7-17
BRETHREN, it is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. Here tithes are received by mortal men; there, by one whom it is testified that he lives. One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him. Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. For it is

evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become a priest, not according to a legal requirement concerning bodily descent but by the power of an indestructible life. For it is witnessed of him, “Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek.”

Gospel Reading: Luke 2:22-40
At that time, the parents brought the child Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons.” Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Symeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. And inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

“Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”

And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him; and Symeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher; she was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years from her virginity, and as a widow till she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. And when they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

Holy New Martyr Jordan of Trebizond
Holy New Martyr Gabriel of Constantinople

Archbishop Dmitri of Blessed Memory: Sermon on the Meeting of our Lord in the Temple

On February 2nd the Church celebrates the great feast of The Meeting of our Lord in the Temple. The Gospel lesson for that day relates how the mother of Jesus brought Him to the temple, as was the custom and requirement under the God-given Law of Moses, of Israel (Exodus 13:2, 12; Leviticus 12:2-8). When the righteous Simeon, who received Christ in his arms at the temple, saw the child, he knew immediately that this was the Redeemer promised by all of Israel's prophecies, for the elder was inspired by the Holy Spirit (Luke 2:26-27). Being inspired, he himself uttered prophetic words which form the hymn sung or chanted at the end of every Vespers service: "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation which Thou hast prepared before the face of Thy people, a light to lighten the gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel" (Luke 2:29-32).

This particular feast is part of the great celebration that began forty days prior, with the Nativity of Christ (December 25). Eight days later (January 1) we remembered the Circumcision of Christ and then His Baptism (January 6). The commemoration of these events in our Lord's earthly life basically form one feast, the feast of the Incarnation of God the Word.

God literally entered the world, into time and history. He was physically present in the midst of His people, His creatures whom He loves. Our Lord took on human nature in order to reconcile unto Himself, man who had strayed far from the Source of his life.

In taking on the "form of a servant" God, at the same time, in the Person of Christ, fulfilled every requirement of the Law that He Himself had given to His people through Moses. He demonstrated, thereby, that everything that had happened in Israel's history could not be described merely as a succession of unrelated events. Rather this was a history with a definite goal: the salvation of mankind. He identified Himself as the Director of that history and fulfilled its expectation.

When the righteous Simeon took the child into His arms and declared that this indeed was Salvation Incarnate, the "Light to lighten the gentiles, and the glory of Israel," a new era began; the era of God's presence among His children.

To this day, all of the Church's celebrations, no matter what the event commemorated may be, whether in the life of Christ, of the Theotokos, or of the saints, all are celebrations of Christ and the establishment on earth of the Kingdom of His presence. He initiated this Kingdom and promised its ultimate realization. And now, just as the Old Israel had awaited the beginning of God's Kingdom, the New Israel (the Church) awaits the Second and Glorious Coming of Christ and the fullness of His Kingdom, revealed.

Although all of our celebrations are intimately rooted in the knowledge that we have been called for complete communion with Christ and to live in function of His Kingdom to which we already belong, we still live in a world that has for the most part rejected what Christ gave it, that is, authentic life “in abundance,” life with real purpose and meaning. We Christians, in spite of having accepted what God’s intervention in human affairs gave us, slip repeatedly and fall into the great temptation to convert the things of this world into gods. We are constantly attracted by ways of seeking happiness and fulfillment that exclude God. This, of course, always proves to be vain and futile.

So our lives vacillate, back and forth, between the assurance of salvation and indifference, between moments of real joy because we know that God is with us, and moments of boredom because we cannot give ourselves totally over to Him.

Every Christian celebration reaches its climax in the Divine Liturgy for the feast. In this sacred work, when God’s people assemble in His name, we actually become participants in the Heavenly Kingdom to come. We are as literally present with Christ in His future Kingdom as the Apostles were with Him at the Last Supper. So the Kingdom is initiated among us and we enjoy it before our time, by anticipation. This is what every Eucharist is; this is what our feasts and celebrations are all about, and that is why the Eucharist is the very center of all of them.

I will emphasize again, however, that although what we have said is true, we continually orient our lives towards everyday pursuits, often living as though we had never experienced this divine reality. That is why repentance and penitential seasons are in order. That is why in approximately one month we will enter the Great Fast or Lent during which time we are exhorted to repent of our sins.

What is important for us Christians is that we have really “seen the True Light, received the Heavenly Spirit, found the true faith” in this experience of the Kingdom of God. The question we must all ask ourselves sincerely, however, is “what are we like when we return into this world after this Heavenly experience?” To Christ Who willed to be held in the arms of the righteous Simeon for our salvation be glory, honor and worship, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

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Day 02-Feb-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: 1 Peter 4:12-5:5; Mark 12:38-44

12 Beloved, do not be astonished at the fiery trial which has come upon you and that is testing you.
It is not as if something strange was happening to you.
13 But because you are partakers of Christ's sufferings, rejoice, so that at the revelation of his glory you also may rejoice with exceeding joy.
14 If you are insulted for the Name of Christ, you are blessed because the divine Spirit of glory is resting upon you.
dOn their part, Christ is blasphemed, but on your part he is glorified.
15 However, let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evil doer or a meddler in other people's matters.
16 Still, if one of you suffers for being a Christian, there is no reason to be ashamed but {instead let such a one} glorify God in this matter.
17 For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God.
If it begins first with us, what will happen to those who do not obey the Good News of God? 18 If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will happen to the ungodly and the sinner?a 19 Therefore, let those who suffer according to the will of God (in doing good) entrust their souls to him who is a faithful Creator.
1 I exhort the presbyters among you, as the fellow-presbyter and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and as one who will also share in the glory that is to be revealed: 2 Be shepherds to the flock of God which is in your care.
Do not oversee the flock under compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but with eagerness.
3 Do not act as lords over those entrusted to you but become examples to the flock.
4 When the chief shepherd is revealed, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.
5 Likewise, you younger ones, be subject to those who are older.
Yes, all of you should clothe yourselves with humility and subject yourselves to one another, for 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

Gospel Reading:

38 In his teaching, he told them, 'Beware of the scribes! They like to walk in long robes, to be greeted in the marketplace, 39 and [to have] the best seats in the synagogues and at banquets.

40 They devour widows' houses, and for a pretense say long prayers.
Such men will be punished most severely.
41 Jesus sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting their money into the treasury.
Many who were rich gave much.
42 A poor widow came, and she put in two small coins, which amount to a quadrand coin.
f 43 He called his disciples to himself, and told them, 'Amen, I tell you that this poor widow gave more than all those [others] who are giving to the treasury.
44 For they all gave out of their abundance, but she, out of her poverty, gave all that she had to live on.

Day 03-Feb-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy and Righteous Symeon the God-receiver and the Prophetess Anna

"There is an ancient tradition that the holy, righteous elder Symeon, who came from Egypt, was one of the Seventy learned Jews chosen in the days of the Pharoah Ptolemy Philadelphus (285-246 BC) for the task of rendering the Hebrew Bible into Greek, and that to Symeon was assigned the translation of the book of the Prophet Isaiah. When he reached the famous passage where the Prophet foretells the virgin birth of Christ, saying: Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel (Is. 7:14), he was so perplexed that he took a penknife to erase the word 'virgin' in order to replace it by 'young woman'. At that moment, an angel of God appeared and prevented him from altering the sacred text, explaining that what seemed impossible to him was, in fact, a prophecy of the coming into this world of the Son of God. To confirm the truth of this, he promised that Symeon would not see death until he had seen and touched the Messiah born of the Virgin. When, after many long years, Christ was brought into the Temple at Jerusalem by the All-Holy Mother of God, the Holy Spirit revealed to the Elder Symeon that the time of fulfilment of the promise had come. He hurried to the Temple and, taking the Child in his arms, he was able to say wholeheartedly to God: Lord, now lettest thou Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy word, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation (Luke 2:29). For indeed, the Elder Symeon was the living image of the ancient Israel of the Old Testament, which having awaited the coming of the Messiah was ready to fade away and give place to the light and truth of the Gospel. The relics of the holy and righteous Symeon were venerated at Constantinople in the church of St James, built at the time of the Emperor Justin.

"The prophetess Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, was eighty-four years old. Since the early death of her husband, she had spent her whole life in the Temple in hope of the coming of the Saviour. She is the pattern for holy widows, virgins and monks, who have freed themselves of worldly cares in order to dwell always in the Temple, offering their fasts, hymns and prayers in eager expectation of the Lord's coming. And when, like Anna and Symeon,

they have seen the indwelling Christ with the eyes of their heart and touched Him through their spiritual senses, they proclaim with joy and assurance to all mankind that the Saviour is still coming into the world: A light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of His people Israel (Luke 2:32)." (Synaxarion)

The Synaxarion notes that the tradition that St Symeon was one of the Seventy is by no means universal among the Fathers. According to some, Symeon was the son of Hillel and father of Gamaliel, St Paul's teacher. According to others, he was a righteous and devout Jew aged 112, neither a priest nor a Pharisee.

Apolytikion

Hail Virgin Theotokos full of Grace, for Christ our God, the Sun of Righteousness, has dawned from you, granting light to those in darkness. And you, O Righteous Elder, rejoice, taking in your arms, the Deliverance of our souls, who grants us Resurrection.

Kontakion

Your birth sanctified a Virgin’s womb and properly blessed the hands of Symeon. Having now come and saved us O Christ our God, give peace to Your commonwealth in troubled times and strengthen those in authority, whom You love, as only the loving One.

Our Father among the Saints, Nikolai (Nicholas), Archbishop and Enlightener of Japan (1912)

Born in Russia in 1836, he became one of the great Orthodox missionaries of modern times. As a boy, he resolved to become a missionary in the far East. With the counsel and blessing of Bishop Innocent of Siberia and Alaska, he went to Japan in 1861 and joined a small Russian mission there. Though the mission's official purpose was to minister to the Russian consular community, the consul-general who invited Hieromonk Nikolai hoped to bring the light of the Orthodox Faith to the Japanese people as well. Realizing that he could only hope to convert the Japanese people if they understood one another well, Fr Nikolai immersed himself in the study of Japanese thought, culture and language. Over the course of his life he translated most of the Bible and most of the Orthodox services into Japanese, and became a fluent speaker of the language. He encountered much resistance: Preaching of Christian doctrine was officially banned in Japan, and a Samurai once approached him with the words "Foreigners must die!" It was this same Samurai who later became his first Japanese priest. In 1880 he was elevated to Bishop of Japan. During the Russo-Japanese war he remained in Japan and labored successfully to overcome nationalist strife that might have harmed or destroyed the Church in Japan. He encouraged all his Japanese faithful to

pray for the Japanese armed forces, though he explained that as a Russian he could not do so, and excluded himself from all public services for the duration of the war. He sent Russian-speaking Japanese priests to the prison camps to minister to Russian prisoners of war. At the time of his repose in 1912, after forty-eight years in Japan, St Nikolai left a Cathedral, eight churches, more than 400 chapels and meeting houses, 34 priests, 8 deacons, 115 lay catechists, and 34,110 Orthodox faithful. The Church of Japan is now an autonomous Orthodox Church under the care of the Moscow Patriarchate.

Neomartyrs Nicholas, Stamatios and John of Chios

Holy Martyrs Adrian and Eubulus at Caesarea

Day 03-Feb-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 2 Peter 1:1-10; Mark 13:1-8
1 Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained
a precious faith like ours, with us, in the righteousness of our God and Saviorb
Jesus Christ: 2 May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God
and of Jesus our Lord.
3 His divine power has granted us all that we need to live in godliness, through the
knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and virtue.
4 Though these things, he has granted to us his precious and tremendous
promises, so that having escaped from the corruption that is in the world by lust,
you may become partakers of the divine nature.
5 For this very reason, do your utmost to add to your faith goodness; and to
goodness, knowledge.
6 To knowledge, add self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to
perseverance, godliness; 7 and in godliness add brotherly affection; and in
brotherly affection, love.
8 Truly, if these things are yours and overflow, they will prevent you from being idle
or unfruitful to the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.
9 But those who lack these things are blind; they only see what is near and they
have forgotten the cleansing from their old sins.
10 Therefore, brethren, do all that you can to make your calling and election
assured.
For if you do these things, you will never stumble.
Gospel reading:

1 As Jesus went out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, 'Teacher, see!
What [amazing] stones and buildings!' 2 Jesus said to him, 'Do you see these
great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be
thrown down.
3 As he sat on the Mount of Olives facing the temple, Peter, James, John, and
Andrew asked him in private, 4'Tell us, when will these things take place? What is
the sign that these things are all about to be fulfilled?' 5 Then Jesus began to tell
them, 'Be careful that no one leads you astray! 6 Many will come in my Name,
saying: 'I am he!a' and they will lead many astray.
7 When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled.
Those things must take place, but the end is not [there] yet.
8 Indeed, nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom! There will

be earthquakes in various places, as well as famines and troubles.
These things are [only] the beginning of birth pains.

Day 04-Feb-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Cyril of New Lake

St Isidore of Pelusium, monk (440-449)

He was born to a noble family in Alexandria. For a short time he taught rhetoric in Pelusium in Egypt; but soon his love for the things of God led him to flee to the Desert as a solitary. After a year of ascetical life, he returned to Pelusium, where he was ordained to the priesthood. After a few years he retired to a monastery where he spent the rest of his life, eventually becoming Abbot. From the monastery he wrote thousands of epistles full of divine grace and wisdom; of these more than two thousand still survive.

Saint Isidore was a student and devout disciple of St John Chrysostom, as he knew him through his writings. When St Cyril became Patriarch of Alexandria, he refused to commemorate St John in the diptychs during the Divine Liturgy. Saint Isidore wrote him a strong letter reminding him not to heed the rumors, prejudices or threats of men, and St Cyril was persuaded to restore commemoration of the Archbishop of Constantinople, and later became a strong advocate of the veneration of St John. Isidore, though a monk, was treated as a spiritual father by Patriarch Cyril: around 433, when St Cyril was inclined to deal harshly with some who had been swept up in the Nestorian heresy, St Isidore wrote to him: 'As your father, since you are pleased to give me this name, or rather as your son, I adjure you to put an end to this dissension lest a permanent breach be made under the pretext of piety.'

With reputation came persecution, and St Isidore suffered much from Imperial and church authorities unhappy with his holy influence. He bore all these troubles impassibly, and in 440 (according to one source) or about 449 (according to another) he joyfully gave up his soul to God.

Venerable Cyril of New Lake (Novoezezrsk) (1532)

When he was only fifteen, St Cyril left home in secret to join the Monastery of St Cornelius of Komel (May 19). Seven years later his father visited the monastery and recognized his son. Instead of persuading Cyril to return to the world, the father was persuaded by his son to enter monastic life; his mother soon joined them, entering a convent nearby. Within the next few years, St Cyril's mother and father both died, prompting him to exclaim 'I too am mortal!' He redoubled his ascetical labors and before long was granted the gift of tears in prayer. Ten years after entering the monastery, St Cyril obtained his abbot's blessing to live the life of a hermit. He lived in complete reclusion, subsisting

on wild greens and mushrooms. After seven years of solitude, he built a hermitage at New Lake and established two churches there. Soon he was ordained to the priesthood. His sanctity attracted a large company of disciples, and he founded a large monastery. There he continued to live in the strictest asceticism and shared in all the common labor of the monks. Once some thieves tried to steal the church bells, but by divine intervention became disoriented and circled the monastery in the dark until morning. When they were apprehended and brought to the Saint, he told them, 'My children, no one has ever been enriched by stealing, but many have lost even what belonged to them.' He then ordered that they be given food and released.

During his lifetime the Saint wrought many healings, and was especially known for restoring the sight of the blind. Once his disciple Athanasius saw an unknown deacon serving with St Cyril at the Liturgy. The mysterious deacon disappeared at the end of the service, and St Cyril forbade his disciple to speak of the incident until after his death. In 1532 the Saint reposed in peace: his last words were 'Glory to God for all things!'

Venerable Nicholas the Confessor
Holy New Martyr Joseph of Aleppo
Martyr Theoktistos

Day 04-Feb-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: 2 Timothy 2:11-19; Luke 18:2-8

11 This saying is sure: For if we died with him, we will also live with him.
If we endure, we will also reign with him.
If we deny him, he also will deny us.
13 If we are faithless, he remains faithful; He cannot deny himself.
14 Remind the people of these things, warning them in the sight of the Lord that they should not argue about words: this profits nothing and it brings ruin to those who listen.
15 Work hard to present yourself as approved by God, as a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.
16 Stay away from godless empty discussions because those involved in it will become more and more ungodly.
17 Their word will consume like gangrene! Some of them are Hymenaeus and Philetus; 18 they are in error concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past and they bring some people's faith to ruin 19 However, God's firm foundation stands, having this seal, 'The Lord knows those who are his,'a and, 'Let every one who calls upon the Name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness.

Gospel Reading:

2'In a certain city, there was a judge who did not fear God and did not care [about anyone].
3 A widow lived in that city, and she often came to him, saying: 'Defend me from my adversary!' 4F or a time, he would not [do anything], but after a while, he said to himself, 'Although I neither fear God nor care for anyone, 5 yet because this widow is bothering me, I will defend her, or else she will wear me out by her continual visits.
' 6 The Lord said, 'Listen to what the unrighteous judge has to say! 7 Will not God grant justice to his elect who are crying out to him day and night,c although he exercises patience regarding them?d 8 I tell you that he will avenge them quickly! And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?'

Day 05-Feb-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Saint Theodosius, Archbishop of Chernigov
Holy Martyr Agatha of Palermo in Sicily (251)

She is one of the best loved and most venerated Martyrs of the West. She was born to a noble family in Catania or Palermo in Sicily. At an early age she consecrated herself to the Lord and, though very beautiful, sought only to adorn herself with the virtues. During the persecution under Decius (251), she was arrested as a Christian; at this time she was about fifteen years old. Quintinian, the Governor of Sicily, was taken by her beauty and offered to marry her, thinking in that way not only to possess her body but her riches as well. When she spurned his advances, and continued to mock the idols, he grew angry and decided to have her tortured. She was gruesomely tormented and cast bleeding into a dungeon to die; but in the night her Guardian Angel brought the Apostle Peter to her, and he healed her wounds. The following day, the Governor ordered that she be subjected to further torments, but at his words the city was shaken by an earthquake and part of the palace collapsed. The terrified people stormed the palace and demanded that Agatha be released, lest they be subject to the wrath of her God. The Saint was returned to her prison cell, where in response to her prayers she was allowed to give up her soul to God.

At Agatha's burial, attended by many, her Guardian Angel appeared and placed a marble slab on her tomb, inscribed with the words 'A righteous mind, self- determining, honor from God, the deliverance of her fatherland.' Quintinian died soon thereafter, thrown from his chariot.

On the first anniversary of Agatha's death, Mt Etna erupted and Catania was about to be engulfed in lava. Christians and pagans together, remembering the inscription on her tomb, took the slab from the tomb and bore it like a shield to the river of lava, which was immediately stopped. The same miracle has happened many times in the following centuries, and Saint Agatha is venerated as the Protectress of Catania and Sicily, loved and honored by Christians of the East and the West.

Our Holy Father Polyeuctus, Patriarch of Constantinople (970)

Born in Constantinople, he was made a eunuch in childhood by his parents, who hoped that he would go into the Byzantine civil service. But he became a monk, and so distinguished himself for his holiness and learning that in 956 he was made Patriarch of Constantinople by the Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos. In his own day he was called 'the Second Chrysostom' for the power of his preaching and his zeal for the Orthodox faith.

In 957, St Polyeuctus baptized the Russian princess St Olga (July 11) in Constantinople; at her baptism, he spoke these prophetic words: 'Blessed are you among all the women of Russia, for you have rejected darkness and desired the light. Moreover, the children of the Russian land will bless you in every generation.' He fell asleep in peace in 970.

Holy New Martyr Antony of Athens (1774)

'Saint Antony was the son of poor Christians from Athens. In order to help his parents, he entered the service of an Albanian Muslim at the age of twelve. In 1770, during the repression which followed the Greek rising in the Peloponnese, his masters sold him to some Turks, who tried in vain to convert him. He was then sold to a succession of five harsh, fanatical masters, but he remained unshaken in the Faith, and was bought at last by a Christian coppersmith in Constantinople. Having been warned one night in a dream that he would receive God's help to obtain the glory of martyrdom, he was recognized next day in the street by one of his former masters, who began shouting to the passers-by that the young Christian was his runaway slave and an apostate from Islam. Antony was dragged to the court amid much commotion. He confessed that he was willing to die a thousand deaths for the love of Christ. "You would become a Christian more easily than you could make me deny my Christ," he told the judge. Unable to persuade the Saint to feign conversion in order to save his life and under pressure from false witnesses, the judge reluctantly committed him to prison. Antony consoled the other Christian prisoners, gave away what little money he had to the poor, and wrote to thank his master for all his kindnesses and through him asked the forgiveness of all Christians and besought the prayers of the Church.

'As the vizir delayed passing sentence, the Saint's accusers made a complaint to the Sultan Abdul Hamid who, fearing a breach of the peace, ordered his immediate execution. The valiant sixteen-year-old went joyfully to the place of martyrdom. He offered his neck to the executioner, who struck him lightly three times to see if the pain would make him yield. Then, finding that he remained steady, he cut his throat like a slaughtered lamb.' (Synaxarion)

Day 05-Feb-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee
2 Timothy 3:10-15; Luke 18:10-14
10 You, however, have paid close attention to my teaching, conduct, purpose,
faith, patience, love, steadfastness, 11 persecutions, and sufferings.
You know what happened to me at Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra.
I endured those persecutions and the Lord delivered me out of them all! 12 Yes, all
those who desire to lead godly lives in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.
13 But wicked impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving others, being
themselves deceived.
14 As for you, remain in what you have learned which is what you firmly believe,
knowing from whom you have learned them.
15 From infancy, you have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you
wise for salvation through faith, which is in Christ Jesus.

Gospel reading: Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee

10 'Two men went up into the
temple to pray; one was a Pharisee,
and the other was a Publican.
11 The Pharisee stood and prayed
by himself, like this: 'God, I thank
you that I am not like the rest of
men, dishonest, unrighteous,
adulterers, or even like this tax
collector.
12 I fast twice a week, I give tithes
of all that I earn.
13 But the tax collector, standing far
aside, would not even lift up his
eyes to heaven.
Instead, he would beat his breast,
saying: 'God, be merciful to me, a
sinner!' 14 I tell you, this man, rather
than the other, went down to his house justified.
For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself
will be exalted.

FROM ST. JOHN OF SINAI'S LADDER OF DIVINE ASCENT Self-esteem, even when there are no other attendant vices, can bring a man down.
Similarly, if we have got into the habit of passing judgments, we can be destroyed completely by this alone, for the Pharisee was condemned for this very thing.
I have seen people who speak aloud their thanks to God but who in their hearts are glorifying themselves, something demonstrated by that Pharisee with his "O God, I thank you" (Luke 18:11). Pride and nothing else caused an angel to fall from heaven.
And so one may reasonably ask whether one may reach heaven by humility alone without the help of any other virtue.
If pride turned some of the angels into demons, then humility can doubtless make angels out of demons.
So take heart, all you sinners.

Day 06-Feb-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

St Photios, patriarch of Constantinople (891)

St Photios, along with St Mark of Ephesus and St Gregory Palamas, is counted as one of the Three Pillars of Orthodoxy, who stood against Latinizing influences on the Orthodox Church.

He was born in Constantinople in 810, son of pious parents belonging to one of the prominent families of the City. Both his parents were martyred during the Iconoclast persecution, leaving their son an example of adherence to the True Faith even unto death. He received a superb education, and was widely considered the single most learned person of his time. He was elevated to the Patriarchal throne in 858, after being raised through all the degrees of the priesthood in six days.

Throughout his Patriarchal reign he was troubled by the usual political battles and intrigues and, more importantly, by various threats to the Faith in the form of Manicheans and Iconoclasts.

Photios showed a special concern for the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world: it was he who commissioned Sts Cyril and Methodius to embark on their mission to the Slavs.

Most memorably, it was the Patriarch's lot to stand against the arrogant, uncanonical and heretical claims of Pope Nicholas I of Rome, who openly asserted for the first time the Pope's pretensions to universal jurisdiction over the Church. When the Patriarch opposed these claims, Pope Nicholas summoned a council of western bishops, which "deposed" Photios and excommunicated all clergy whom he had ordained. In 867 the Emperor Michael III was assassinated, and his successor Basil I deposed Photios, had him imprisoned, and reinstated his predecessor Ignatius. To gain legitimacy for this widely-opposed move, he submitted it to the Pope for approval. Delighted, the Pope ratified the Emperor's decision and used it to advance the claims of the Papacy. When the eastern bishops realized what was happening they prevailed on the Emperor to release Photios from his three-year imprisonment; and when Ignatius died, the Church unanimously returned Photios to the Patriarchal throne. A Council in Constantinople in 879-880, at

which Photios presided, restored communion between the Eastern and Western Churches but at the same time anathematized the heretical addition of the filioque to the Creed, which the Papacy had been promoting.

When Leo VI succeeded Basil I as Emperor, the Patriarch was once again deposed, and was imprisoned in the Monastery of the Armenians for five years. During this time he wrote the Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit, a learned and eloquent refutation of the filioque heresy. The Saint, still imprisoned, reposed in peace in 893.

Sts Barsanuphius and John the Prophet, monks of Palestine (6th c.)

'Saint Barsanuphius the Great, who was from Egypt, and his disciple, Saint John the Prophet, struggled in very strict reclusion during the sixth century at the monastery of Abba Seridus at Gaza of Palestine, and were endowed with amazing gifts of prophecy and spiritual discernment. They are mentioned by Saint Dorotheus of Gaza, their disciple, in his writings. Many of the counsels they sent to Christians who wrote to them are preserved in the book which bears their names. Once certain of the Fathers besought Saint Barsanuphius to pray that God stay His wrath and spare the world. Saint Barsanuphius wrote back that there were "three men perfect before God," whose prayers met at the throne of God and protected the whole world; to them it had been revealed that the wrath of God would not last long. These three, he said, were "John of Rome, Elias of Corinth, and another in the diocese of Jerusalem," concealing the name of the last, since it was himself.' (Great Horologion)

Saint Barsanuphius lived in such reclusion that only Abbot Seridus ever saw him: once a week the Abbot would bring him three loaves and some water, and would write down the Saint's counsels. Some of the brethren came to suspect that Barsanuphius was an invention of the Abbot, and to relieve their minds he came out of his cell for the only time, greeted them, washed their feet, and withdrew again.

It is unknown when St Barsanuphius reposed. When it was suspected that he had died in his cell, the Patriarch of Jerusalem ordered that it be opened, but fire blasted forth from the door, preventing any from entering.

Saint Bucolus, Bishop of Smyrna

Fausta, Evilasius and Maximus the Holy Martyrs

Holy Martyr Dorothea

Day 06-Feb-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 2 Peter 1:20-2:9; Mark 13:9-13
20 Know this first of all, that no interpretation of Scriptural prophecy happens as something private, 21 because no prophecy ever came by human will: holy men of God spoke, being moved by the Holy Spirit However, false prophets also arose among the people, as false teachers will also be among you.
They will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.
2 Many will follow their immoral ways and as a result, the way of the truth will acquire a bad reputation.
3 They will exploit you greedily with deceptive words.
Their sentence, pronounced long ago, does not linger, and their destruction does not slumber.
4 For God did not spare angels when they sinned but cast them down to Tartarus and committed them to pits of darkness to be reserved for judgment.
5 He did not spare the ancient world but preserved Noah (a preacher of righteousness) with seven others when he brought a flood on the world of the ungodly.
6 He also turned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemning them to destruction and making them an example to those who would lead ungodly lives.
7 He delivered the righteous Lot who was very distressed by the lustful behavior of these wicked people: 8 that righteous man was living among them and was tormented every day in his righteous soul when he saw and heard lawless deeds.
9 The Lord knows how to deliver the godly from temptation and how to hold the wicked for their punishment on the day of judgment,

Gospel Reading:
9 But be on your guard, for people will hand you over to the courts.
b You will be beaten in the synagogues, you will stand before rulers and kings for my sake, as a testimony to them.
10 The Good News must first be preached to all the nations.
11 When they take you away and arrest you, do not worry in advance.
Do not think ahead about what you will say, but say whatever will be given you in that hour.
For it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.

12 Brother will deliver up [his own] brother to death, and a father his [own] child.
Children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death.
13 You will be hated by all for my Name's sake, but the one who endures to the
end will be saved.

Day 07-Feb-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Our Holy Father Parthenius, Bishop of Lampsacus (4th c.)

He was an illiterate fisherman, but always listened carefully to the readings of Holy Scripture in church, and strove to put their teaching into practice. Whatever he earned from his trade he gave to the poor, keeping back nothing for himself. His charity became so well-known that Philetus, Bishop of Melitopolis, ordained him to the priesthood, charging him to travel throughout the diocese visiting Christians. Parthenius fulfilled his mission admirably, and his many miracles and healings — even raising the dead to life — showed that divine favor rested on him. Ascalus, Metropolitan of Cyzicus, made him Bishop of Lampsacus, at that time an almost completely pagan city. By virtue of his preaching, prayer and fasting, St Parthenius in time converted the whole city to Christ.

Miracles of healing poured forth from the holy bishop so reliably (according to the Synaxarion) the city's doctors became superfluous. Demons took flight at the Saint's approach. Once, when he commanded a demon to depart from a poor man, the spirit begged him, 'Give me a place to live, even swine!' 'No,' the bishop replied, 'But you may come and dwell in me!' The demon fled, crying as though burned, 'How can I enter God's house? Great is the power of the Christians!'

Once Parthenius visited Heraclea in Thrace, whose Bishop Hypatian was extremely ill. The Saint revealed to the bishop that avarice was the true cause of his ailment. 'Give to the poor the goods that you are withholding from them, and you will recover.' The Metropolitan had himself carried to the church on a stretcher and publicly gave all his possessions to the poor. Three days later he was completely cured. On leaving the city, Parthenius told the Metropolitan that his own death was near and, soon after returning to Lampsacus, reposed in peace.

Our Venerable Father Luke the New of Mount Stirion (~950)

Is there such a thing as a natural monk? Saint Luke was born in 896 to pious parents who came from Aegina but were forced to settle on the Greek mainland due to Saracen raids. From his earliest years, he showed a desire for a life of ascesis and contemplation usually only found in seasoned elders. He abstained from all flesh, cheese, eggs, and delicacies, drank only water, and kept a total fast on Wednesdays and Fridays. While herding cattle or tilling the family fields, he would often give away his food and even his clothing to the poor, returning home naked. When his father died, he

abandoned farm work to devote himself entirely to prayer, making such progress that he was often lifted above the ground while praying. After a time he secretly left home and entered a monastery in Athens (he was now only fourteen years old), but the abbot sent him home after seeing his mother every night in dream, tearfully calling for her son. He returned home for a while, but when he had obtained her permission to leave once again set out upon the monastic life. He traveled widely, living as a hermit in various places, sometimes attached to a monastery and sometimes not. Often he would be forced to move by the number of visitors who learned of his holiness, no matter how secretly he tried to live, and came to him for prayer or a word of counsel or prophecy. Once he lived for three years on the island of Ampelon; his sister would occasionally bring him some bread, but he gave much of it away to the needy or to passing sailors. Finally, his health damaged, he returned to the mainland at the entreaties of his disciples and settled at a place called Stirion (which may be a corruption of Soterion), where he built a hermitage.

Saint Luke fell ill in his seventh year at Stirion. Embracing his disciples, he asked them to pray for him, prophesying that the place where he died would someday be the site of a great church and monastery; he then reposed in peace and joy.

His tomb exuded a fragrant oil which was collected and burned in a lamp, and many miracles and healings were wrought at the tomb. As the Saint had predicted, two churches and a monastery were built there, and the monastery of Hosios Lukas became a great place of pilgrimage, as it remains to this day.

Venerable Mastridia of Jerusalem
Peter of Monovatia
Holy New Martyr George of Crete
The 1,003 Martyrs of Nicomedia

Day 07-Feb-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: 2 Peter 2:9-22; Mark 13:14-23

9 The Lord knows how to deliver the godly from temptation and how to hold the wicked for their punishment on the day of judgment, 10 especially those follow the desires of their corrupt human nature and have no respect for [angelic] authority.
Daring and self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of the glorious ones,
11 whereas angels, although greater in might and power, do not bring a slanderous judgment against them before the Lord.
12 But these people act as creatures without reason, as natural animals [that are meant] to be taken and destroyed.
They speak evil in matters about which they are ignorant and in their attempt to destroy they will surely be destroyed, 13 receiving the wages of unrighteousness.
These are people who consider it pleasurable to revel in the daytime.
They are spots and blemishes, amusing themselves in their deceit while they {celebrate the agape} feast with you.
14 Their eyes are full of adultery and they cannot break away from sin.
They entice unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, and they are children of cursing.
15 Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray by following the path of Balaam the son of Beor who loved being paid for doing evil.
16 But he was rebuked for his own disobedience: a donkey (who normally does not speak) spoke with a human voice and stopped the madness of the prophet.
17 These people are wells without water, clouds driven by a storm, for whom the gloom of darkness has been reserved forever.
18 With their high-sounding but empty talk, they entice those who are indeed escaping (from those who live in error in the lusts of the flesh) by [promoting] licentiousness.
19 They promise them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for whoever is overcome by something is brought into slavery by what has overcome him.
20 If, after they have escaped the defilement of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in it and overcome [by it], their last state has become worse than the first! 21 It would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, rather than, after knowing it, to turn away from the holy commandment delivered to them.
d 22 It has happened to them according to the true proverb, 'The dog returns to his own vomit' and 'the swine that had been washed [has returned] to wallowing in the

mire.

Gospel Reading:
14 But when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet standing where it should not stand (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea should flee to the mountains.
15 Then, whoever is on the housetop should not go down or enter in to take anything out of the house.
16 He who is in the field should not come back to take his cloak.
17 But woe to those who are with child and to those who nurse babies in those days! 18 Pray that your flight will not be in the winter! 19 For in those days, there will be oppression such as there has not been since the beginning of God's creation until now, and never will be.
20 If the Lord had not cut those days short, no one would be saved; but for the sake of the elect whom he chose, he has shortened the days.
21 Then, if anyone tells you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'Look, there!' do not believe it.
22 For false christs and false prophets will arise, and they will show signs and wonders in order to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.
23 You, therefore, must be on your guard.
Behold, I have told you all things beforehand.

Day 08-Feb-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Great-Martyr Theodore Stratelates ("the General") of Heraclea (319)

He was a renowned commander in the Imperial army, and dwelt in Heraclea of Pontus. The Emperor Licinius heard of Theodore's fame as an officer, and also that he was a devout Christian; the Emperor determined to visit the general, officially to honor him, but secretly to turn him from Christ.

When the Emperor came to Heraclea, Saint Theodore met him with all honor, and the Emperor in turn praised him for his service to the state. Licinius then publicly bade Theodore make sacrifice to the gods. Theodore asked that he be given the most venerable gods, made of gold and silver, to attend upon at home, and promised that the following day he would return and honor them before the people. The Emperor, thinking that he had succeeded in restoring Theodore to paganism, gladly agreed.

That night the Saint smashed all the idols he had taken home, and distributed the gold and silver pieces to the poor. When this was discovered, Theodore gladly admitted his deed and confessed Christ boldly. The Emperor, in a fury, had the Saint subjected to many tortures, then crucified. On the cross, he was subject to further torments and mutilations: parts of his body were cut off, his eyes put out, and he was shot with arrows, finally being left on the cross for dead. The next day Licinius sent men to cast his body into the sea, but to their amazement they found the Saint alive, his body perfectly intact. Through this, many spectators and some of the Emperor's own men turned to Christ. Seeing that the Saint, far from renouncing Christ, was leading others to Him, the Emperor promptly had him beheaded. His holy relics were returned to his family home in Euchaita, where they worked so many miracles that the town came to be known as Theodoropolis.

Holy Prophet Zechariah (6th c. BC)

He was among those who returned to Jerusalem from the Babylonian captivity, following the decree of Cyrus in 538 BC. With the Prophet Haggai (December 16) he began to prophesy in Jerusalem in 520, to encourage the

Jews to return to their task of rebuilding the Temple, which they had given up in discouragement. His prophetic ministry is described both in the Book of Ezra and in the Old Testament book that bears his name. His prophecies, in addition to speaking to the situation in which he lived, are replete with prophecies of the coming, and second coming, of Christ. His name means "The Lord is renowned." Sozomen's Ecclesiastical History reports that under the Emperor Honorius, Zacharias' holy relics were discovered by divine revelation in Palestine, and were found to be incorrupt.

St Sabbas II, Archbishop of Serbia (1271)

He was the son of St Stephen the First- Crowned King of Serbia (September 24), and the nephew of St Sabbas (Sava) (January 14), the first Archbishop of Serbia. Like his uncle, he became a monk at the monastery of Chilandar on Mt Athos, where he zealously lived the ascetical life until he was elected Bishop of Zachounios, then Archbishop of Serbia. He fell asleep in peace in 1271, having shepherded his flock with love and wisdom. His holy relics are in the monastery of Pech.

Holy Martyrs Nicephoros and Stephanos

Martha, Mary and Lykarion of Egpyt

Day 08-Feb-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 2 Peter 3:1-18; Mark 13:24-31
1 This is now, beloved, the second letter that I have written to you and in both of them, I stir up your sincere mind by reminding you 2 that you should remember the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets and the commandments of us who are the apostles of the Lord and Savior.
3 First of all, know that in the last days, mockers will come, walking after their own lusts.
4 They will say, 'Where is the promise of his coming? Since the days that our forefathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.
5 But they willfully forget that in the old days, there were the heavens and the earth, formed out of water and through water by the word of God.
6 By means of water, the world of old was flooded with water and perished.
7 But by the same word, the heavens and the earth that exist now have been reserved for the fire of the day of judgment and for the destruction of those who are ungodly.
8 Beloved, do not forget that with the Lord, one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day! 9 The Lord is not slow concerning his promise, as some people think that he is.
Instead, he is patient with us, not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.
10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night and in this day, the heavens will pass away with a rushing noise, the elements will be dissolved by intense heat, and the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.
a 11 Therefore, since all these things will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people should you be in terms of holy living and godliness! 12 You should look for and eagerly desire the coming of the day of God, which will cause the burning heavens to be dissolved and the elements to melt with intense heat!
13 But, according to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness is at home.
14 Therefore, beloved, as you look for these things, do your utmost to be found in peace, without blemish and blameless in his sight.
15 Consider the patience of our Lord as salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to youb with the wisdom given to him.
16 He does so in all his letters, speaking of these things.
However, his letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which the

untaught and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they also do to with the other Scriptures.
17 Beloved, since you know these things in advance, be careful and fear that being carried away with the error of the wicked, you might fall from your own secure position.
18 Instead, grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory, both now and unto ages of ages.
Amen.

Gospel Reading:
24 But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, 25 the stars will be falling from the sky, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken.
26 Then, people will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.
27 After that, he will send out his angels and [they] will gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the sky.
28 Learn this parable from the fig tree.
When the branch has become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that the summer is near! 29 Likewise, when you see these things taking place, know that it is near, at the doors! 30 Amen, I tell you: this generation will not pass away until all these things happen.
31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Day 09-Feb-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Leavetaking of the Meeting of Our Lord.
Holy Martyr Nicephorus (~257)

Sapricius the priest and the layman Nicephorus lived in Antioch of Syria. Though they were the closest of friends, a disagreement between them led to estrangement and then to outright enmity. In time, Nicephorus came to himself and realized that reconciliation and love among brethren are precious in the sight of the Lord, and he sent to Sapricius to ask his forgiveness for Christ's sake. But his messengers were turned away, and Sapricius coldly refused any reconciliation. At the same time he violated the Lord's commandment by continuing to serve at the altar without seeking to make peace. Nicephorus finally went in person and threw himself at Sapricius' feet, but even this had no effect.

Soon, persecution of Christians broke out, and Sapricius was arrested. When he confessed Christ without fear or hesitation, and refused to make sacrifice to the idols even under torture, he was condemned to be beheaded. Nicephorus was distressed that Sapricius might give his life in Christ's name while still at enmity with a brother; and that he himself would lose his chance to make peace. As Sapricius was being led to the place of execution, Nicephorus went on his knees before him and cried 'Martyr of Christ, forgive me the offences for which you are angry with me!' Still, Sapricius coldly spurned his former friend's pleas. For this reason, as the executioner was raising his sword, and the crown of martyrdom was only seconds away, God withdrew his grace from the priest, who turned to the executioner and declared his readiness to adore the idols. Nicephorus, who was among the witnesses, begged him not to apostatise, but his words were of no effect. Nicephorus then turned to the executioner and shouted 'I am a Christian! I believe in our Lord Jesus Christ whom he has just denied. Let him go and put me to death in his place!'

The Governor agreed, and ordered the release of Sapricius and the execution of Nicephorus. The Martyr laid his neck on the block joyfully and claimed the crown that Sapricius had thrown away. The Synaxarion concludes:

'When he departed for heaven to receive the crown of glory, Saint Nicephorus left to us Christians a vivid illustration of these words uttered by the Holy Spirit: If I deliver my body to be burned but have no love, I gain nothing (1 Cor. 13:3). If you do not forgive men their trespasses neither will

your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses... For the measure you give will be the measure you get (Matt. 6:15; 7:2).'

Hieromartyr Peter of Damascus, bishop of Damascus (~776)

"Saint Peter was Bishop of Damascus during the reign of Constantine Copronymus (c. 776) and a contemporary of Saint John of Damascus. He was arrested on the orders of the Caliph Walid for castigating the heretical doctrines of the Muslims and the Manichaeans. His tongue was cut out and he was exiled to South Arabia (Arabia Felix), where he continued to teach the true Faith and to serve the holy Mysteries until he entered into the reward of his labours in heaven.' (Synaxarion)

Peter of Damascus, Hesychast (12th c.)

Little is known of him except by his writings in the Philokalia . Saint Nikodemos, compiler of the Philokalia, writes that his work is 'a recapitulation of holy watchfulness... a circle within a circle, a concentrated Philokalia within the more extendedPhilokalia.'

Hieromartyrs Marcellus, Philagrius and Pancratius

Saint Romanos, the Wonderworker of Cilicia

Day 09-Feb-2023 Thursday

Fast Free
Readings of the day: 1 John 1:8-2:6; Mark 13:31-14:2
8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.
9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous so that he will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar and his word is not in us.
My little children, I write these things to you so that you may not commit sin.
But if someone does commit a sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous.
2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the whole world.
3 This is how we have come to recognize that we know him: if we keep his commandments.
4 The one who says, 'I know him,' and yet does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in such a person.
5 But if someone keeps God's word, God's love has most certainly been perfected in him.
This is how we know that we are in him: 6 whoever claims to abide in him should also live just as he lived.

Gospel Reading:

31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.
32 But no one knows that day or that hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.
33 Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time is.
34 It is like a man who journeyed to another country.
He leaves his house, gives authority to his servants and to each one his task.
He also instructed the doorkeeper to keep watch.
35 Watch therefore, for you do not know when the lord of the house is coming [back], whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning.
36 But fear that coming suddenly, he might find you sleeping.
37 What I tell you, I [also] tell everyone: keep watch!' It was now two days before the feast of the Passover and of the unleavened bread.
The chief priests and the scribes were seeking a way to arrest him by deception in

order to kill him.
2 They said, 'Not during the feast, because there might be a riot of the people.

Day 10-Feb-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Hieromartyr Haralambos (Charalampus), bishop of Magnesia (202)

"This great saint was bishop in Magnesia, and suffered for Christ at the age of 113. When a violent persecution broke out under the Emperor Septimus Severus, the aged Charalampus did not hide from his persecutors, but freely and openly preached the Christian faith. He endured all tortures as though not in the body, and when they flayed the living flesh from him, the godly saint said to the Emperor's soldiers: 'Thank you, my brethren, for scraping off the old body and renewing my soul for new and eternal life.' He performed many wonders and brought many to the Faith. Even the Emperor's daughter, Gallina, repudiated the paganism of her father and became a Christian. Condemned to death and led to the place of execution, St Charalampus raised his arms to heaven and prayed for all men, that God would give them bodily health and salvation of soul, and that He would grant them the fruits of the earth in abundance: 'Lord, Thou knowest that men are flesh and blood; forgive them their sins and pour out Thy blessing on all.' After praying thus, the saintly elder gave his soul to God before the executioner had laid his sword to his neck. He suffered in 202. Gallina took his body and buried it." (Prologue)

The Great Horologion puts his age at 103.

Apolytikion

O wise Haralambos, you were proven an unshakable pillar of the Church of Christ; an ever-shining lamp of the universe. You shone in the world by your martyrdom. You delivered us from the moonless night of idolatry O blessed one. Wherefore, boldly intercede to Christ that we may be saved.

Kontakion

O Priest-martyr, athlete, champion Haralambos, your relics are a priceless treasure of the Church. Wherefore she rejoices, glorifying the Creator.

St Scholastica of Italy, sister of St Benedict (543)

She was the twin sister of St Benedict, patriarch of monasticism in the West (March 14), and his constant fellow-laborer in the vineyard of Christ. They lived in neighboring monasteries; though they loved one another dearly, they met only once a year, spending the day in prayer and spiritual conversation, then parting after sharing a simple meal. At their meeting in 543, she prevailed on her brother (and the monk who accompanied him) to break his own monastic rule and stay with her in vigil through the night. Three days later, as Benedict looked out his cell window, he saw his sister's soul in the form of a dove ascending to heaven.

Recommended: The Holy Twins: Benedict and Scholastica, a beautifully illustrated children's book about the two Saints; by Kathleen Norris, illustrated by Tomie dePaola.

Our Venerable Father Prochorus of the Kiev Caves (1107)

"A wonder-worker of the Monastery of the Caves in Kiev, he was named the Orach-eater because the whole time he lived in the monastery, he never tasted bread but fed himself on orach [a kind of wild spinach] prepared according to his own particular method as a sort of bread. When he gave someone some of this bread with his blessing, it was as sweet as honey, but if someone stole some, it was as bitter as wormwood.

"At one time, when there was a dearth of salt in Russia, Prochorus distributed ashes to the people for salt. The ashes that he distributed with his blessing became salt; ashes, however, that anyone took for himself remained ordinary ashes. Prince Svyatopolk ordered that all the ashes from Prochorus' cell be brought to the court without his permission, let alone his blessing. When the ashes were brought there, it was obvious to everyone that they were ashes and not salt. Then Prochorus told all the people who came to him for salt to go to the prince's court, and, when thr prince threw the ashes away, to take them and use them as salt. This they did, and the ashes again became salt. The prince himself, learning of this, was filled with a deep respect and love for him and, when Prochorus died in 1107, placed him with his own hands in a grave near the great Russian saints, Antony and Theodosius." (Prologue).

Anastasius II, Archbishop of Jerusalem

Holy Martyrs Porphyrios and Baptus

Day 10-Feb-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 1 John 2:7-17; Mark 14:3-9
7 Brethren, I am not writing a new commandment to you.
This is an old commandment which you have had since the beginning.
This old commandment is the messaged which you have heard from the beginning.
8 Yet, in another way, it is a new commandment that I write to you; it is true in him and in you because the darkness is passing away and the true light already shines! 9 Anyone who claims to be in the light and hates his brother [or sister] is still in the darkness.
10 Anyone who loves his brother [or sister] remains in the light, and there is no occasion for stumbling in such a person.
11 But whoever hates a brother [or sister] is in the darkness and lives in the darkness; such a person does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.
12 I write to you, children, because your sins are forgiven through his Name.
13 I write to you, fathers, because you know the one who has existed from the beginning.
I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.
I write to you, children, because you know the Father.
14 I have written to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning.
f I have written to you, young men, because you are strong; and the word of God remains in you, and you have overcome the evil one.
15 Do not love the world or the things that are in the world.
The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; 16 because everything that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, pride in possessions, is not from the Father but from the world.
17 The world is passing away with its lusts, but the one who does the will of God remains forever.

Gospel Reading

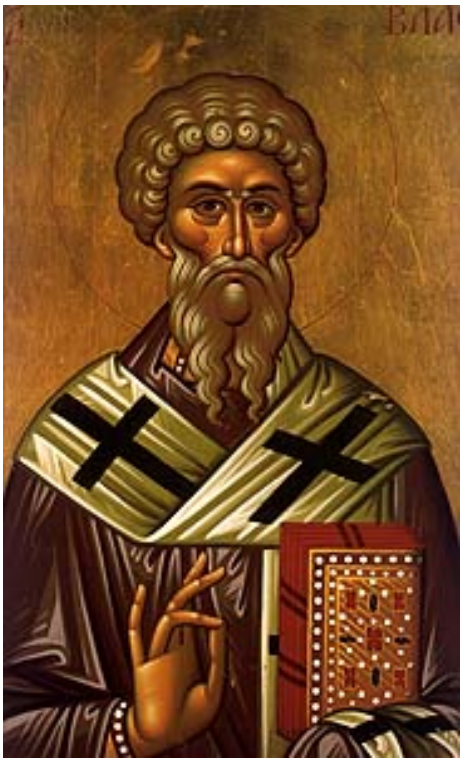
3 While Jesus was at Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard.
She broke the jar, and poured the oil over his head.
4 But there were some who were upset and who said, 'Why has this ointment been

wasted? 5 It could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and given to the poor.
They grumbled against her, but Jesus said, 'Leave her alone! Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for me.
7 You always have the poor with you, and whenever you want to, you can do them good; but you will not always have me! 8 She has done what she could: she has anointed my body in advance for the burial.
9 Amen, I tell you: wherever this Good News will be preached throughout the whole world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.

Day 11-Feb-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Hieromartyr Blaise, bishop of Sebaste (316)



He was born in the province of Armenia, and was a physician by profession. Such was his reputation for holiness that his fellow-citizens elected him Bishop of Sebaste in eastern Anatolia. Though there were few Christians in that pagan city, the bishop labored tirelessly for his flock, encouraging them to stand firm during the fierce persecutions then raging, and visiting the martyrs in prison.

When the city was stripped of Christians, all of whom had fled or been killed, the bishop, already an old man, withdrew to a cave on Mount Argea and devoted himself entirely to prayer. As they often do,the wild beasts sensed his sanctity, and gathered around the cave, waiting quietly for him to give his blessing or heal their injuries and ailments.

The persecutors, who had not stopped hunting for the bishop, eventually found his cave, and were amazed to find it like a second Eden, with lions, tigers, bears and wolves grazing peacefully around it. The Saint greeted them cheerfully and told them that he knew from a vision that they were coming for him.

As Blaise was taken back to Sebaste, the peace and gentleness that seemed to radiate from the Saint were enough in themselves to turn many pagan bystanders to faith in Christ. Diseases of men and animals were cured as he walked by. One mother brought him her child, who was choking on a fishbone. The Saint put his hand down the child's throat, took out the fishbone, and prayed to the Lord to restore him to full health. (For this reason he is invoked in the West for the cure of throat ailments).

At his trial, the holy bishop fearlessly confessed Christ and scorned the idols, for which he was savagely beaten with rods and thrown into a dungeon. Seven women and two of their children were imprisoned with him. The women were slain first after many tortures. The Synaxarion continues, "Having failed in his efforts to break Saint Blaise's resolve, Agricolaus [the governor] condemned him to be drowned in the lake. The holy Martyr made the sign of the Cross at the water's edge and began walking across the surface of the

lake as the Saviour had done on the Sea of Galilee. On reaching the middle, he invited the pagans to join him, if they believed they could trust themselves to their gods. Sixty-eight of them took up the challenge and drowned, while a bright angel appeared and invited the Saint to return to the shore in order to receive the crown of glory." Then Blaise and the two young children were beheaded together.

Saint Blaise is one of the most-venerated holy healers in both the East and the West. He is called upon for protection from wild beasts, and for the healing of every kind of ailment. His head is kept at the Monastery of Konstamonitou on Mount Athos.

St Theodora the Empress (867)

Theodora was the wife of Emperor Theophilus the Iconoclast, but secretly revered the icons, and protected others who did, until the emperor's death. Upon his death, she quickly restored veneration of icons to churches throughout the empire, the event celebrated on the upcoming Sunday of Orthodoxy, the first Sunday of the Great Fast. She ruled wisely as regent for the young emperor Michael for fifteen years: she is said to have initiated the mission of Sts Cyril and Methodios to the Slavs. Before Michael III reached his majority, he was prevailed upon by Bardas, Theodora's brother, to depose her and send her to a monastery, where she finished her life in peace and holiness.

When Constantinople fell, her incorrupt relics were taken to Corfu along with those of St Spyridon. They are still venerated there.

There is a much-debated story that, when Theophilus was dying, the Empress, moved by compassion for him, brought an icon of the Mother of God out of hiding and laid it on his face; and that Theophilus, coming to himself, kissed the holy icon and confessed the true Faith before giving up his soul. Other accounts say that the Emperor died in heresy. It seems possible that the holy Empress circulated the story to ensure that her departed husband would be remembered in the Church's prayers.

Venerable Demetrius of Priluki (1392)

He entered monastic life as a youth and was a disciple of St Sergius of Radonezh. After years of monastic obedience he was ordained to the priesthood, then founded a monastery on the shores of Lake Priluki, whose rule followed that of the Lavra of St Sergius. Saint Demetrius, who was exceptionally handsome, always concealed his face behind his monastic veil

and never conversed with women. Once a noblewoman, driven by curiosity, managed to catch sight of his face in church. She immediately fell paralyzed to the ground. The Saint asked her 'My child, why did you want to gaze at the face of a sinner who has long been dead to the world?' He then gave her some words of instruction in the spiritual life and sent her away healed.

In time St Demetrius became so renowned in Russia that the flow of visitors burdened him and he retreated to an uninhabited area to live as a hermit, until he was found out and made abbot of a nearby monastery. He kept a constant fast, living only on prosphora and water. In his own lifetime the Saint was known for his gift of prophecy, his care for the poor, and his healings. Once his brother sought his blessing to trade with the pagans in the far north. He made a good profit there and asked for a blessing to return. This time the Saint would not give his blessing, but his brother went anyway, and was killed by pagans.

Toward the end of his life St Demetrius withdrew into solitude in his cell. One day the brethren noticed a wonderful aroma of incense coming from his cell and knew that he had departed this life for heaven. After his repose he continued to work countless miracles, healing illnesses (especially the plague), and driving away invaders.

Holy Martyr George of Kratovo

Finding of the Relics of the Prophet Zachariah, Father of the Holy Forerunner

Day 11-Feb-2023 Saturday

Fast Free
Readings of the day: 2 Timothy 3:1-9; Luke 20:45-21:4
But know that in the last days, troubled times will come.
2People will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful and unholy.
3[They will be] without natural affection, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, no lovers of good, 4treacherous, stubborn, self-important, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; 5having an appearance of godliness but having rejected its [inner] meaning.
Stay away from these people too.
6 Indeed, some of these creep into houses and captivate gullible women who are burdened with sins, led away by various lusts, 7 always learning yet never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.
8 Even as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, these people also oppose the truth.
They are mentally corrupted and as far as the faith is concerned, they are rejected.
9 But they will not go very far because their folly will be obvious to all, as in the case of Jannes and Jambres.

Gospel Reading:

45 While all the people were listening, Jesus said to his disciples, 46 'Beware of the scribes who like to walk in long robes and who love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts.
47 They devour the houses of widows and for a pretense say long prayers: they will receive greater condemnation!' Looking up, Jesus saw the rich who were putting their gifts into the treasury.
2Then, he saw a certain poor widow casting in two small brass coins.
b 3He said, 'Amen, I tell you that this poor widow has put in more than all of them!
4For all these [people] put in gifts for God from their abundance, but she, out of her poverty, put in all that she had to live on.

Day 12-Feb-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

St Meletios, archbishop of Antioch (381)

Our holy father Meletios, an Armenian by birth, became archbishop of Antioch at the height of the Arian controversy. Though he was appointed by influential Arians who thought that he shared their views, as soon as he was raised to the throne he began to preach the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father. "At this, the archdeacon, an Arian, put his hand over the bishop's mouth; Meletios then extended three fingers towards the people, closed them, and extended one only, showing by signs the equality and unity of the Trinity. The embarrassed archdeacon then seized his hand, but released his mouth, and Meletios spoke out even more forcibly in defense of the Council of Nicea" (Great Horologion). It was St Meletios who ordained St John Chrysostom reader and deacon in Antioch. He presided at the Second Ecumenical Council in 381. At his repose, St Gregory of Nyssa gave his funeral oration, lamenting: "Our Elijah has been caught up, and no Elisha is left behind in his place."

Apolytikion

A model of faith and the image of gentleness, the example of your life has shown you forth to your sheep-fold to be a master of temperance. You obtained thus through being lowly, gifts from on high, and riches through poverty. Meletios, our father and priest of priests, intercede with Christ our God that He may save our souls.

Kontakion

Fearing thy spiritual boldness, the apostate Macedonius doth flee; and as we accomplish the service wherein we seek thine intercessions, we, thy servants, hasten to thee with longing, O Meletius, thou equal of the Angels, thou fiery sword of Christ our God which doth utterly slay all the godless. We praise thee, the luminary which doth illumine all.

St Alexis, metropolitan of Moscow and wonder-worker of all Russia (1378)

He was born early in the 14th century to a family of court dignitaries in Moscow. Despite a fine education, he was not drawn to worldly success and became a monk at the age of twenty. In time Alexis was consecrated Bishop of Vladimir, then Metropolitan of Moscow, at that time the highest rank in the Russian church (which was still under the Patriarchate of Constantinople). Russia was then under the cruel domination of the Tatars. Saint Alexis traveled twice to the Golden Horde, where the Tatar Khan kept court. On his first visit (1359), he healed the Khan's wife of a blindness which had afflicted her for three years — a miracle that did much to soften the Tatars' treatment of their Russian vassals, and to preserve the liberty of the Church.

His ceaseless labors in the world did not deprive the Saint of his love for monasticism: he conferred with holy monks at every opportunity, and founded many new monasteries. As he neared the end of his life he tried without success to persuade his friend St Sergius of Radonezh (September 25) to succeed him. He reposed in peace in 1378. His incorrupt relics are venerated in the Cathedral of the Theophany in Moscow.

Saint Anthony, Archbishop of Constantinople

Holy Martyrs Plotinus and Saturninus

Mary of Alexandria

Saint Meletios of Ypseni (Rhodes)

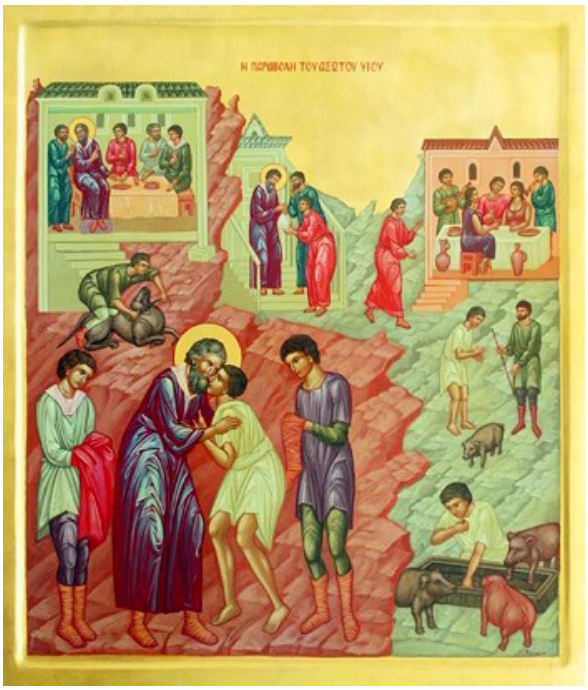
Day 12-Feb-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

The return of the Prodigal Son
1 Corinthians 6:12-20; Luke 15:11-32
12 [You say:] 'All things are lawful for me, but not all things are beneficial.
'All things are lawful for me,' but I will not be brought under the power of anything.
13 'Food is for the stomach, and the stomach is for food,' but God will bring to nothing both of these.
However, the body is not for sexual immorality, it is for the Lord; and the Lord is [made] for the body.
14 Now, God raised up the Lord, and he will also raise us up by his power.
15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be! 16 Or do you not know that whoever is joined to a prostitute is one body? For God says, 'The two will become one flesh.
d 17 But whoever who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.
18 Flee sexual immorality! 'Every sin that a person can do is outside the body,' but whoever commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.
19 Or do you not know that your body is a sanctuary of the Holy Spirit which dwells in you, and which you have from God? You are not your own! 20 You were bought with a price! Therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which belong to God.

Gospel Reading: The return of the Prodigal Son

11 Jesus said, 'A certain man had two sons.
12 The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that will come to me.
So the father divided his livelihood between them.
13 A few days later, the younger son gathered all that he had and traveled to a far country.
There, he squandered his property, living immorally.
14 When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place in that country, and he began to be in need.
15 He went and hired himself to one of the citizens of that country who sent him into his fields to feed pigs.
16 He wanted to feed himself with the husks that the pigs ate, but no one gave him



anything.
17 But when he came to himself, he said,
'How many of my father's hired servants
have bread enough to spare, and I am dying
with hunger! 18 I will get up, go to my father,
and tell him, 'Father, I have sinned against
heaven and before you! 19 I am no longer
worthy to be called your son.
Make me as one of your hired servants.
' 20 So he set off and went to his father.
But while he was still at a distance, his father
saw him and was moved with compassion.
He ran, and embraced his son, and kissed
him.
21Then the son said, 'Father, I have sinned
against heaven and before you! I am no
longer worthy to be called your son.
22 But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the first robe and put it on him! Put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet! 23 Bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24 for this, my son, was dead, and he is alive again! He was lost and [now he] is found!' And they began to celebrate.
25 Now, his elder son was in the field.
As he came near to the house, he heard music and dancing.
26 Calling one of the servants, he asked what was going on.
27 The servant replied, 'Your brother has returned! Your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and healthy.
28 However, the elder son became angry and he would not go in.
Therefore, his father came out and begged him.
29 But he answered his father, 'Look, for so many years I have served you, and I have never disobeyed a commandment of yours.
Yet, you never gave me a goat so that I might celebrate with my friends.
30 But when this, your son, arrived, he who has devoured your living with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.
31 The father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours! 32 But it was fitting to celebrate and to rejoice, for this, your brother, was dead, and is alive again.
He was lost and is found!"

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING

Our approach to the Great Lenten Fast in preparation for Holy Pascha brings again familiar parables and events to increase our understanding of the Christian way and deepen our spiritual life as we seek to draw closer to Christ.
This will include self-examination in the light of the readings and other content of

our worship which enables us to experience the growth which is not momentary but life long, hence the necessity to hear again and again the riches brought before us year by year.
Last week we recalled the one who extolled his own virtues.
It was not that generous giving was wrong, nor fasting (both very commendable) but what the Pharisee was guilty of was his boastfulness and judgemental attitude towards others.
We do not know what the tax collector's problems were but whatever they might have been he merely pleaded for forgiveness and in the simplest but heartfelt words – 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' Today we are reminded of the fact that the Prodigal Son made some serious mistakes but then there is a saying that 'the man who never made any mistakes never made anything at all!'.
At least he came to recognise how he went wrong and saw that the way out of his predicament was to first acknowledge the fact - 'he came to himself" (v 17) and then realising that the remedy was to return to all that had been good and wholesome in his life and ask forgiveness from the provider of those good things.
The two brothers were perhaps not so different from each other.
Whilst the prodigal went off and fell into bad ways his elder brother showed envy, resentment and anger by the way his brother was treated on his return.
Perhaps the elder brother was always prone to these passions and today's parable highlights the fact? Yet among the beautiful passages in the Bible is that which records the father's response to the elder brother's tantrum: 'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours.
' (v 31). The father's love was impartial – no favourites.
The rejoicing was right and the sons and the servants all were able to make merry and join in the feast celebrating the return of the one who was lost but now found, as if dead but now alive.
Two other parables in this chapter are about losing and finding – that of the lost coin and the lost sheep – both stressing the inportance of recovering the lost and rejoicing when found.
Today's parable is of a generous, loving and forgiving father; sons equally loved; faithful servants; one household.
We know that this parable speaks to us about our loving God who allows us our freedom and how that freedom can be misused and in its misuse bring us distress and suffering.
It is possible to continue on that course unless and until we remember, as did the Prodigal Son, where the place for healing of those ills is and the one who provides the remedy.
Next Sunday – of the Last Judgement or Meatfare – begins the Great Lenten Fast in earnest, the season of 'bright sadness".
'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' Pharisee, tax-collector, prodigal, brother, servants, we all are called by God to take part in the journey to Holy Pascha, for

this is where we know our joy will be complete.
Oeconomos Nikitas Lantsbery

Day 13-Feb-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

St Martinian, monk, of Caesarea in Palestine (422)

"The life of this saint is wonderful beyond measure and is worth reading in full. What did he not endure to fulfil the Law of God? At the age of eighteen, he went off into a mountain in Cappadocia called the Ark and spent 25 years in fasting, vigils and prayer, and struggling with manifold temptations. When a woman came to tempt him and he saw that he would fall into sin with her, he leapt barefoot into the fire and stood in it until the pain brought forth tears from his eyes and he had killed all lust within himself. When other temptations arose, he fled to a lonely rock in the sea and lived there. When, though, in a shipwreck, a woman swam to the rock, he leapt into the sea intending to drown himself. But a dolphin took him upon its back and brought him, by God'd providence, to the shore. He then decided to make nowhere his permanent home but to travel incessantly. Thus he pased through 164 towns in two years, exhorting and advising the people. He finally arrived in Athens, where he died in 422." (Prologue)

Holy Apostles and Martyrs Priscilla and Aquila

Aquila and his wife Priscilla (or Prisca) were Jews from Pontus who settled in Rome, where they worked as tent-makers. When the Emperor Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome in 49-50, they moved to Corinth. (They may already have been Christians; at that time the Empire made no distinction between Christians and Jews.) In Corinth they hosted the Apostle Paul, who lived and worked with them for awhile (Acts 18:1-3). They worked diligently with the Apostle, traveled with him, and were considered worthy to bring Apollos (December 8) to a full knowledge of the Faith (Acts 18:26)

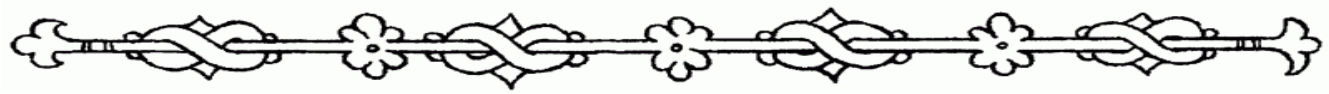
Priscilla and Aquila returned to Rome around 58, and later went to Ephesus; they were living there when St Paul asked his disciple Timothy, Bishop of Ephesus, to greet them (2 Tim. 4:19). It was probably in Ephesus that they were martyred by the pagans.

St Symeon the Myrrh-streamer, founder of the Chilandar Monastery (1200)

He was born in 1114. In the world, he ruled the kingdom of Serbia as Stephen Nemanja; after ruling wisely and mercifully for many years, he renounced all worldly wealth and glory in 1196 to become a monk. Traveling to the Holy Mountain, he took for his spiritual father his own son Sava, who had preceded him in renouncing royal honor for a life of prayer. Together Symeon (as he was named in monastic life) and his son founded Hilandar monastery. His wife Anna became a nun, taking the name Anastasia; she is also commemorated

as a saint of the Church. After his repose, St Symeon's relics exuded a fragrant and healing myrrh. Saint Sava brought his father's holy relics back to Serbia. The Synaxarion says "From Saint Symeon's empty tomb at Chilandar, a vine miraculously sprang up whose dried grape seeds are to this day sent all over the world as a blessing for childless married couples."

Saints Zoe and Photina



Day 13-Feb-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 1 John 2:18-3:10; Mark 11:1-11
18 Children, this is the last hour! As you have heard, the Antichrist is coming and
even now many antichrists have arisen.
This is how we know that it is the final hour.
19 They went out from us, but they did not belong to us! If they had belonged to
us, they would have continued with us.
But [in fact] they left, so that it might be revealed that none of them belonged to us!
20 You have an anointing from the Holy Onea and you perceive all things.
21I have not written to you because you do not perceive the truth, but because you
perceive it, and because no lie is of the truth.
22 Who is the liar? Is it not anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ?c This is
the Antichrist: the one who denies the Father and the Son.
23 Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father.
24 As for you, what you have heard since the beginning should remain in you.
If what you have heard since the beginning remains in you, you also will remain in
the Son and in the Father.
25 This is the promise which he promised us: eternal life.
26 I have written to you these things concerning those who would lead you astray.
27 As for you, the anointing which you received from him remains in you, and you
do not need anyone to teach you.
His anointing teaches you about all things; [his anointing] is true, not a lie.
You will remain in him, just as the anointing has taught you.
28 Now, little children, remain in him so that when he appears, we may have
boldness and not be ashamed before him when he comes.
29 If you understand that he is righteous, you also understand that everyone who
practices righteousness is born of him.
Behold, how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be
called God's children!f For this reason, the world does not understand us, because
it did not understand him.
2Beloved, we are already God's children, but what we will be is not yet revealed.
But when he is revealed, we know that we will be like him; for we will see him just
as he is! 3Everyone who has this hope set on him purifies himself, just as he is
pure 4Everyone who sins breaks the law and in fact, sin is lawlessness.
5You know that Christ was revealed to take away our sins, and in him there is no
sin.
6 Whoever remains in him does not continue in sin, but whoever practices sin has

not seen him and does not know him.
7 Little children, let no one lead you astray.
Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.
8 Whoever lives in sin belongs to the devil, since the devil has been a sinner from the beginning.
This was the purpose of the manifestation of the Son of God, to undo the work of the devil.
9 Those who have been born of God do not keep on sinning because God's seed abides in them.
They cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God.
10 This is how the children of God and the children of the devil are revealed: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, and neither is the one who does not love his brother [or sister].

Gospel reading:
11 The Entrance into Jerusalem As they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethsphage and Bethany near the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples
2 and said to them, 'Go your way into the village that is facing you.
Immediately as you enter into it, you will find a young donkey tied, on which no one has ever sat.
Untie him and bring him [to me].
3 If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord needs him and will send him back right away.
' 4 They went away and found a young donkey tied by a door outside, in the open street.
As they untied him, 5 some of the bystanders asked them, 'What are you doing, untying the young donkey?' 6 The two disciples replied just as Jesus had said, and the people let them go.
7 They brought the young donkey to Jesus, threw their garments on it, and Jesus sat on it.
8 Many spread their garments on the way, while others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road.
9 Those who went in front as well as those who followed cried out, Hosannaa! Blessed is he who comes in the Name of the Lord!b 10 Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is coming in the Name of the Lord!c Hosanna in the highest!
11 Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple.
After looking around at everything, since it was now evening, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

Day 14-Feb-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Our Holy Father Auxentius (470)

He was of Persian origin, born in Syria. As a young man, he distinguished himself as a member of the court of the Emperor Theodosius the Younger. Seeing the vanity of the world's honors and pleasures, he became a monk in Constantinople; but when the people began to praise his holiness, he fled to Mount Oxeia near Chalcedon, which later became known as Auxentius' Mountain. There he built a small hut and lived in reclusion; but in time he was discovered by some shepherds, and the faithful began to come in increasing numbers for his teaching, blessing, prayers and healing. He performed countless miracles, but such was his humility that he always sought to avoid their being attributed to him. When he was asked to pray for someone's healing, he would try to refuse, saying "I too am a sinful man." But, when he was prevailed on by the pleas of the people, he would call on all of them to pray together for the healing; or he would remind them that God would give according to their faith; or he would say to the sick person "The Lord Jesus Christ heals you." When the Emperor Marcian summoned the Fourth Ecumenical Council to Chalcedon, he ordered that the hermit join the assembly of holy Fathers. Auxentius refused, saying that doctrinal teaching was the province of bishops, not monks. The Emperor's envoys took him by force. He was greeted with honor by the Emperor, and affirmed all the decisions of the Council.

He never returned to Mount Oxeia, but settled in an even wilder and more remote spot on Mount Skopa, which later came to be called Mount St Auxentius. His disciples built him a tiny wooden hut with one small window through which he could converse with his steady stream of visitors. He reposed in peace in 470. A great crowd gathered for his funeral, and his holy relics were taken into the care of a women's monastery whose spiritual Father he had been.

Mount St Auxentius soon became a center of hesychastic life, with seven monasteries.

Saint Cyril, Equal to the Apostles and Enlightener of the Slavs (869)

See the joint commemoration of Sts Cyril and Methodius on May 11.

Venerable Isaac, Recluse of the Kiev Caves

Righteous Maron of Syria

Abraham, Bishop of Carrhae

New Martyr George of Mitylene

Day 14-Feb-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free
Readings of the day: 1 John 3:11-20; Mark 14:10-42
11 This is the message which you heard from the beginning: that we should love one another! 12 We should not be like Cain who was of the evil one and who killed his brother [Abel].
Why did he kill him? Because his works were evil, while his brother's works were righteous.
13 Do not be surprised, my brethren, if the world hates you.
14 We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brethren.
Whoever does not love his brother [or sister] remains in death.
15 Whoever hates his brother [or sister] is a murderer, and you know that eternal life does not remain in a murderer.
16 This is how we know what love is: that he laid down his life for us.
We too should lay down our lives for the brethren.
17 But if someone is well-off in worldly possessions and sees one of the brethren in need and yet refuses to help, how does the love of God remain in such a person?c 18 My little children, let us not love only in word or speech, but in deed and truth.
19 This is how we know that we are of the truth and obtain assurance in his presence; 20 even if our own hearts condemn us, God is greater than this and knows all things.

Gospel Reading:
10 Judas Iscariot, who was one of the Twelve, went off to [meet] the chief priests, in order to deliver Jesus to them.
11 When they heard this, they were glad, and promised to give him money.
Judas began to seek how he might conveniently deliver him.
12 On the first day of unleavened bread, when the Jews sacrificed the Passover, his disciples asked him, 'Where do you want us to go and make preparations so that you may eat the Passover?' 13 He sent two of his disciples and said to them, 'Go into the city, and there you will meet a man carrying a pitcher of water.
Follow him, 14 and wherever he enters, tell the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, 'Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?"
15 He will himself show you a large upper room furnished and ready.
Make preparations for us there.

16 His disciples went out, and came into the city, and found things as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover.
17 When it was evening, Jesus came with the Twelve.
18 As they sat and were eating, Jesus said, 'Amen, I tell you: one of you will betray me; the one who eats with me.
19 They began to be distressed, and they asked him, one by one, 'Surely not I?' And another said, 'Surely not I?' 20 He answered them, 'It is one of the Twelve, the one who dips with me in the dish.
21For the Son of Man goes just as it is written about him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man not to have been born.
22 As they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after saying a blessing, he broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'Take, eat.
This is my body.
23 He took the cup, and after giving thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it.
24 He said to them, 'This is my blood of the newa covenant, which is poured out for many.
25 Amen, I tell you: I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the Kingdom of God.
26 After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.
27 Jesus said to them, 'All of you will be made to stumble because of me tonight,c for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.
d 28 However, after I am raised up, I will go before you into Galilee.
29 But Peter said to him, 'Even if all fall away, I will not!' 30 Jesus said to him, 'Amen, I tell you that today, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times!' 31 But Peter insisted, 'If I must die with you, I will not deny you!' And they all said the same thing.
32 They arrived at a place which was named Gethsemane.
Jesus said to his disciples, 'Sit here while I pray.
33 He took with him Peter, James, and John, and began to be greatly troubled and distressed.
34 He said to them, 'My soul is extremely sorrowful, even to death.
e Stay here, and keep watch.
35 He went ahead a little, fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass away from him.
36 He said, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible to you.
Please remove this cup from me.
However, not what I desire, but what you desire.
f 37 Coming back, he found the disciples sleeping, and said to Peter, 'Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not watch one hour? 38 Watch and pray, that you may not enter into temptation.
The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak!' 39 Again, he went away, and

prayed, saying the same words.
g 40 Once again, he came back and found them asleep because their eyes were very heavy, and they did not know what to answer him.
41 The third time, he came and said to them, 'Sleep on now, and take your rest. It is enough! The hour has come! Behold, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.
42 Arise, let us be on our way, for behold, the one who betrays me is near.

Day 15-Feb-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Apostle Onesimos (~109)

He was a Phrygian by birth, a slave of Philemon, to whom the Apostle Paul addressed his epistle. Onesimos escaped from Philemon and fled to Rome, where he was converted to the Faith by St Paul. St Paul sent him back to his master, who at St Paul's urging gave him his freedom. He served the Church for many years before dying a martyr, beaten to death with clubs.

Saint Onesimos is also commemorated on November 22, with Sts Philemon, Archippus and Aphia; and on January 4 at the Synaxis of the Seventy Disciples.

Apolytikion

O Holy Apostle Onesimus, intercede to our merciful God, that He may grant our souls forgiveness of sins.

Kontakion

Thou didst shine upon the world as a bright sunbeam, shining with the rays of Paul, the sun of most resplendent light, who hath enlightened the world entire. Thus, we all honour thee, blessed Onesimus.

Our Venerable Father Dalmatius of Siberia (1697)

Saint Dalmatius is venerated as a pioneer of the movement that took many ascetics to dwell in the wilderness of Siberia, establishing a new company of Desert Fathers and causing the Russian Far North to be called the 'Northern Thebaid.' He was born in Tobolsk and reared in piety by his family, recently-converted Tatars. When grown, he entered the imperial army as a Cossack and served with such distinction that the Tsar awarded him a noble title. He married and lived in Tobolsk in comfort and prosperity. One day — after the destruction of Tobolsk in a great fire in 1643 — struck by a realization of the vanity of worldly things, he left family, wealth and property and went to a monastery in the Ural Mountains, taking with him only an icon of the Dormition of the Theotokos.

He was tonsured a monk with the name of Dalmatius, and devoted himself to prayer and ascesis with such fervor that, a short time later, the brethren elected him Abbot. Fearing pride and fleeing honor, Dalmatius fled with his icon of the Theotokos to a remote cave, where he lived a life of silence and

continual prayer. His presence did not long remain secret in that sparsely-settled region, and soon Christians were coming from far and wide to ask his prayer and counsel; many pagans came to him for holy Baptism. Soon his habitation became too small for those who had chosen to stay as his disciples, and the Saint received a blessing from the Bishop of Tobolsk to build a wooden chapel and some cells. This was the beginning of the great Monastery of the Dormition (also called the Monastery of St Dalmatius).

Over the years the brethren endured many tribulations. Once the Tatar Prince of the region, provoked by false rumors, planned to destroy the monastery and kill all the monks. The night before the attack, the holy Mother of God appeared to the prince in resplendent clothes, holding a flaming sword in one hand and a scourge in the other. She forbade the Prince to harm the monastery or the brethren, and commanded him to give them a permanent concession over the region. Convinced by this vision, the Prince made peace with the monks and became the Monastery's protector, though he was a Muslim.

In the succeeding years the Monastery was repeatedly burned down by the fierce pagan tribes which inhabited the area; once all the monks except St Dalmatius himself were butchered, but always the monastery was rebuilt. The Saint reposed in peace in 1697, and was succeeded as abbot by his own son Isaac, who built a stone shrine at the Monastery to house the relics of the Saint and the icon of the Mother of God which he had kept with him throughout his monastic life.

Our Venerable Father Anthimos of Chios (1960)

He was born in 1869 to devout peasants on Chios; he left elementary school early to become a shoemender. At the age of nineteen he visited a monastery (founded by the monk Pachomios, who had been the spiritual counsellor of St Nektarios); he was so moved by the monks' 'angelic life' that on returning home he built himself a small hut and dwelt in it. His only 'help' in his spiritual contests was an icon of the Mother of God, which soon began to work miracles, drawing many to his hermitage. After a time he retired to a monastery where he was tonsured under the name Anthimos. He fell ill there, and his abbot sent him home to his parents for the sake of his health. At home, despite the fact that he was caring for his aged parents and practicing his shoemender's trade, he continued to live as a monk, spending nights on end in prayer and sometimes living only on bread and water for extended periods.

Increasing numbers of visitors came to his hermitage and wonder-working icon of the Theotokos, and in 1910 he received the Great Schema. The people of Chios wanted him to be ordained to the priesthood, but his bishop refused due to the Saint's lack of education. At the prompting of Anthimos' godfather, the Bishop of Smyrna ordained him instead. After a pilgrimage to Mt Athos, he returned to Chios, where he became chaplain to a leper hospital.

Soon the hospital, which had fallen into corruption, became a spiritual center, as much like a monastery as a hospital. Saint Anthimos tended many of the sickest with his own hands, working many miracles of healing; some of his recovered patients became monks or nuns.

With the notorious 'Exchange of Populations' of 1922-1924, refugees poured into Chios, many of them destitute nuns and girls. In response to a vision of the Mother of God, St Anthimos built a monastery, which opened with thirty nuns and grew rapidly, despite the opposition of many who said that setting up such a community was out of date (in 1924!). The monastery soon housed eighty nuns and was known througout Greece as a model of monastic life. Father Anthimos served as priest to the nuns, and continued to receive the many faithful — often sixty or seventy per day — who came to him for prayer or counsel. He carried on this ministry for more than thirty years, working many miracles of healing. When he was too old to work with his hands, he retired to his cell and prayed that he be enabled to serve his neighbor until his last breath. He reposed in peace at the age of ninety-one, mourned and revered by the whole island of Chios.

Eusebios the Righteous
Major the Soldier and Martyr

Day 15-Feb-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 1 John 3:21-4:6; Mark 14:43-15:1
21 Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness toward God.
22 Whatever we ask, we receive from him because we keep his commandments and do what is pleasing in his sight.
23 This is his commandment: that we should believe in the Name of his Son Jesus Christ, and that we should love one another, even as he commanded.
24 All who obey his commandments remain in him, and he remains in them.
By this, we know that he remains in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.
1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to determine whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.
2 This is how you can discern the Spirit of God: every spirit who confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.
3 But every spirit who does not confess Jesus Christ as having come in the flesh is not from God, and this is the spirit of the Antichrist which you have heard is coming, and is already in the world.
4 You are of God, dear children and you have overcome these worldly people because the one who is in you is greater is than the one who is in the world.
5 These people are of the world.
Therefore, they speak according to [the spirit of] the world, and the world listens to them.
6 We are of God: Whoever knows God listens to us.
Whoever is not of God does not listen to us.
By this we can discern the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Gospel Reading:

43 Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him came a crowd with swords and clubs, sent by the chief priests, the scribes, and the presbyters.
44 Now, the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and take him away under guard.
45 So, when the traitor came, he immediately went up to Jesus and said, 'Rabbi! Rabbi!' and kissed him.
46 They laid their hands on Jesus and arrested him.
47 But one of those who stood by drew his sword, and struck the servant of the

high priest, cutting off his ear.
48 Jesus said, 'Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to seize me? 49 Every day I was with you in the temple, teaching, and you did not arrest me! But this is [taking place] so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled.
50 All his disciples left him and fled.
51 A certain young man was following Jesus,c who only wore a linen cloth [as a tunic].
The young mend grabbed him, 52 but he left the linen cloth [behind], and fled from them naked.
e 53 They led Jesus away to the high priest, and all the chief priests, the presbyters and the scribes were assembled.
54 Peter had followed Jesus from a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest.
He was sitting with the officers, warming himself in the light of the fire.
55 Now, the chief priests and the whole council were looking for witnesses [to testify] against Jesus in order to put him to death.
But they could not find any.
56 Many gave false testimony against him, and their testimony did not agree with each other.
57 Some stood up, and bore false witness against Jesus, saying:
58 'We heard him say, 'I will destroy this sanctuary that is made with hands, and in three days, I will build another made without hands.
59 Even so, their testimony did not agree.
60 The high priest stood up in their midst and asked Jesus, 'Do you have no answer? What is this which these testify against you?' 61 But Jesus remained silent and answered nothing.
Again, the high priest asked him, 'Are you the Christ,a the Son of the Blessed?' 62 Jesus replied, 'I am.
You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of the sky.
63 At this, the high priest tore his robes and said, 'What further need do we have for witnesses? 64 You have heard the blasphemy! What is your decision?' And they all condemned him as deserving death.
65 Some began to spit on him, to blindfold him, and to beat him with fists, saying, 'Prophesy!' And the officers struck him with the palms of their hands.
66 As Peter was in the courtyard below, one of the maidservants of the high priest came in.
67 Seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him, and said, 'You were also with Jesus the Nazarene!'
68 But he denied it, saying, 'I do not know or understand what you are talking about!' He went out on the porch, and the rooster crowed.
69 When the servant girl saw him there, she began to tell those who stood by, 'This is one of them!' 70 But again, he denied it.

A little while later, those who stood by again said to Peter, 'Surely you are one of them! You are a Galilean, and your accent shows it.
71 But Peter began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, 'I do not know this man of whom you speak!' 72 The rooster crowed the second time, and Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him, 'Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.
When he thought about that,c he broke down and wept.
As soon as it was the morning, the chief priests, the presbyters, the scribes and the whole council held a consultation.
Having bound Jesus, they carried him away and delivered him to Pilate.

Day 16-Feb-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Saint Flavian, Patriarch of Constantinople
Flavian the Hermit
Saint Maruthas
Holy Venerable Martyr Romanus of Mount Athos

Martyrs Pamphilius and those with him, at Caesarea in Palestine (308)

These twelve holy Martyrs suffered in the reign of Diocletian.

"The first of these, Pamphilius, was priest in the church at Caesarea in Palestine; a learned and devout man, he corrected the mistakes of various copiers in the text of the New Testament. He himself copied this saving Book and gave it to any who desired it. The second was a deacon, Valentine, old in years and white with wisdom. He was a great expert in the Holy Scriptures, knowing them by heart. The third was Paul, a respected and eminent man, who had on a previous occasion been cast into the fire for the sake of Christ. With them were five Egyptians, brothers both in blood and soul, who were returning to their native land from serving a sentence in the mines of Cilicia. As they reached the gate of the town of Caesarea they said that they were Christians, and were therefore brought to trial. When asked their names, they replied: 'We have cast away the pagan names given us by our mother, and are called Elias, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Samuel and Daniel.' when asked where they were from, they replied: 'From Jerusalem that is above.' They were all beheaded, and a young man called Porphyrius, who had searched for their bodies to give them burial, suffered soon afterwards. Him they burned. An officer, Seleucus, who had come up to the martyrs and embraced them before the sword descended on their heads, was also burned, and an old man, Theodulus, a servant of the Roman judge, who had embraced one of the martyrs while they were under escort. Lastly Julian, who had kissed the dead bodies of the martyrs and honoured them, followed them in death. So they exchanged the small for the greater, the tawdry for the precious and death for immortality, and went to the Lord in 308." (Prologue)

The Synaxarion concludes, "After the martyrdom of Pamphilius, the leader of the glorious cohort, the impious governor gave orders that his body and those of his companions should be left where they lay as food for carnivorous animals. However by God's Providence, no animal came near their holy relics, which the Christians were able to lay to rest with due honour." The account of these Martyrs was written by Eusebius of Caeserea, Pamphilius' disciple.

Day 16-Feb-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: 1 John 4:20-5:21; Mark 15:1-15

20 If someone says, 'I love God,' and yet hates his brother [or sister], such a person is a liar! If someone does not love the brethren who can be seen, how can such a person [claim to] love God whom he has not seen? 21Indeed, this is commandment we have received from him: that the one who loves God should also love his brethren.

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father also loves the one who is born of the Father.

2 By this we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and keeping his commandments.

3 Truly, this is the love of God: that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not burdensome.

4 Everyone born of God overcomes the world! This is the victory that has overcome the world: your faith.

5 And who overcomes the world? Is it not the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? 6 This is the one who came by water and blood: Jesus Christ; not with water only, but with water and blood.

It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.

7 There are three who bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.

And there are three that testify on earth>: 8 the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and the three agree as one.

9 If we accept human testimony, God's testimony is greater because this is God's testimony concerning his {very} Son! 10 Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself, but whoever does not believe God has made God to be a liar, because such a person has not believed the testimony that God has given concerning his Son.

11 This is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son! 12 Whoever has the Son has {the}b life, but whoever who does not have God's Son does not have {the} life.

13 I have written these things to you who believe in the Name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal lifea and continue to believe in the Name of the Son of God.

14 This is the boldness which we have toward him: if we ask anything according to his will, he listens to us! 15 And if we know that he listens to us, no matter what we ask, we [also] know that we have obtained the petitions which we have asked of

him.
16 If you see one of the brethren committing a sin that does not leads to death, you should intercede in prayer and God will give life to those brethren whose sin does not lead to death.
But there is a {typec of} sin that leads to death, and I do not say that you should make a request in this case.
17 All unrighteousness is sin, yet there is a {type of} sin which does not lead to death.
18 We know that whoever is born of God does not practice sin; whoever has been born of God is protected {by God}, and the evil one does not take hold of such a one.
19 We know that we are of God and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.
20 We know that the Son of God has come, and he has given us understanding so that we may know him who is true.
Indeed, we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ.
This is the true God, and eternal life.
d 21Dear children, keep yourselves from idols!

Gospel Reading:
1 As soon as it was the morning, the chief priests, the presbyters, the scribes and the whole council held a consultation.
Having bound Jesus, they carried him away and delivered him to Pilate.
2 Pilate asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' Jesus answered, 'You have said it.
3 The chief priests began to accuse him of many things.
4 Again, Pilate asked him, 'Do you have no answer? See how many charges they bring against you!' 5 But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate was astonished.
6 Now, he used to release to the Jewsa one prisoner on the occasion of the feast, whichever one they asked of him.
7 There was one called Barabbas, who was then in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the uprising.
8 The multitude, crying aloud, began to ask Pilate to do as he always did for them.
9 Pilate answered them, 'Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?'
10 For he understood that it was from envy that the chief priests had delivered Jesus.
11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd so that Pilate would release Barabbas to them, instead [of Jesus].
12 Pilate again asked them, 'What then should I do to the one whom you call the King of the Jews?' 13 'Crucify him!' they shouted.
14 Pilate said to them, 'Why, what evil has he done?' But they shouted even

louder, 'Crucify him!' 15 Wishing to please the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them, and after having Jesus flogged, he handed him over to be crucified

Day 17-Feb-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Great-martyr Theodore the Tyro (~306)

The Greek Tyron means "conscript." This holy Martyr of Christ came from Pontus and was a Roman legionary during Maximian's persecution (~303). Though he had been a Christian since childhood, he kept his faith secret while in the army. While his cohort was stationed near a town called Euchaita, he learned that the people there were being terrorized by a dragon which lived in the neighboring forest. He set off to face the dragon, praying to God that the outcome of the contest would be a sign to him of whether the time had come to offer himself for martyrdom. He found the fire-spitting monster and, arming himself with the sign of the Cross, drove his spear through its head and killed it.

His success convinced him that, having vanquished this fleshly dragon, he was ready to vanquish the spiritual dragon, the Devil. When the commander of his camp next ordered a sacrifice to the Gods, Theodore boldly refused, saying "I am a Christian!" Further, he encouraged the other Christians in his company to do the same. That night he went to a nearby pagan temple of Rhea, mother of the gods, and burned it down. He was seen by the caretaker of the temple and was brought unresisting to the governor Publius. Theodore was thrown into a solitary dungeon cell; there he refused bread and water, saying that Christ had promised him food from heaven. He spent his time there chanting hymns with the angels, so that the guards were convinced that other Christians had somehow joined him in his cell.

When all argument, cajolery, bribery and threat had failed to turn the soldier from Christ, the governor resorted to torture, subjecting the Saint to terrible mutilations; but when Theodore endured them calmly and resolutely, the governor began to fear that his example would encourage other Christians, and ordered that he be burned. Taken to the stake, the Martyr walked freely into the flames, where he gave back his soul to God. When his body was ransomed and taken from the ashes by a pious Christian, it was found to be untouched. A church was built in Euchaita in honor of the Martyr; many

pilgrims came there for the healing of soul and body.

In 361, the Emperor Julian the Apostate ordered the Prefect of Constantinople to have all foods in the marketplaces sprinkled with blood of animals sacrificed to the pagan gods during the first week of Lent, so that Christians would be unable to escape contact with idolatry. But St Theodore appeared in a vision to Patriarch Eudoxius (360-364), warned him of the plan and told him to instruct his flock not to buy any food in the marketplace, but to eat kolyva made from boiled wheat grains. So, through the Saint's intervention, the people were preserved from the stain of idolatry. Ever since, the Church has commemorated the miracle on the first Saturday of Great Lent. Since that time kolyva has come to be offered also in honor of the Saints and in memory of the departed. The whole grain represents the body, sown corruptible, which will be raised incorruptible (2 Cor. 15:37); it is usually sweetened with honey to signify the delights of Paradise.

Saint Mariamna, Sister of the Holy Apostle Philip
Venerable Theodosius the Bulgarian and his disciple Roman
Theodore the Silent of the Kiev Caves
Saint Hermogenes, Patriarch of Moscow

Day 17-Feb-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 2 John 1:1-13; Mark 15:22-25, 33-41

1 The presbyter, to the elect lady and to her children, whom I love in truth; and not
I only, but also all those who know the truth.
2 This is for the sake of truth which remains in us and will be with us forever! 3May
grace, mercy and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from the Lord
Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.
4I greatly rejoice that I have found some of your children walking in truth, even as
we have been commanded by the Father.
5Now I beg you, dear lady, not as though I wrote to you a new commandment but
the one we have had from the beginning: we must love one another! 6 This is love:
that we walk according to his commandments.
This is the commandment, as you have heard from the beginning, that you should
live accordingly.
7 Many deceivers have gone out into the world, people who do not confess that
Jesus Christ came in the flesh.
This is the deceiver and the Antichrist.
8 Watch yourselves, so that we may not lose what we have accomplished but
receive a full reward.
9 Whoever does not remain in the teaching of Christ but transgresses does not
have God; but whoever remains in the teaching [of Christ] has both the Father and
the Son.
10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive or
greet such a person.
11 Whoever welcomes such people participates in their evil works.
12 Even though I have many things to write to you, I do not want to do so with
paper and ink.
Instead, I hope to come to you and speak face to face, so that our joy may be
complete.
13 The children of your chosen sister greet you.
Amen.

Gospel Reading

22 And they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha, which means, 'The place
of a skull.

23 They offered him wine mixed with myrrh to drink, but Jesus did not take it.
24 Then, they crucified him and shared his garments among them, casting lots for them to see what each one would take.
33 When the sixth houre came, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.
g 34 At the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' which is, being interpreted, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'h 35 Some of those who stood by, when they heard this, exclaimed, 'Behold, he is calling Elias (Elijah)!' 36 One [of them] ran to fill a sponge with vinegar.
He put it on a reed and gave it to Jesus to drink.
Then he said, 'Let us leave him alone and see if Elias (Elijah) will come to take him down.
37 But Jesus cried out with a loud voice and gave up the spirit.
38 The veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from the top to the bottom.
39 When the centurion who stood there in front of Jesus saw that he had cried out like this and breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was Son of God!' 40 There were also women watching from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James 'the little'i and of Joses, and Salome.
41 When Jesus was in Galilee, they had followed him and served him; along with many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

Day 18-Feb-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

St Leo the Great, pope of Rome(461)

Pope Leo was one of the great bastions of Orthodoxy during the time of the monophysite heresy and its offshoots. 'According to some, this Saint was born in Rome, but according to others in Tyrrenia (Tuscany), and was consecrated to the archiepiscopal throne of Rome in 440. In 448, when St Flavian, Archbishop of Constantinople [also commemorated today], summoned Eutyches, an archimandrite in Constantinople, to give account for his teaching that there was only one nature in Christ after the Incarnation, Eutyches appealed to St Leo in Rome. After St Leo had carefully examined Eutyches' teachings, he wrote an epistle to St Flavian, setting forth the Orthodox teaching of the person of Christ, and His two natures, and also counseling Flavian that, should Eutyches sincerely repent of his error, he should be received back with all good will. At the Council held in Ephesus in 449, which was presided over by Dioscorus, Patriarch of Alexandria (and which Saint Leo, in a letter to the holy Empress Pulcheria in 451, was the first to call "The Robber Council"), Dioscorus, having military might behind him, did not allow Saint Leo's epistle to Flavian to be read, although repeatedly asked to do so; even before the Robber Council was held, Dioscorus had uncanonically received the unrepentant Eutyches back into communion. Because Saint Leo had many cares in Rome owing to the wars of Attila the Hun and other barbarians, in 451 he sent four delegates to the Fourth Ecumenical Council, where 630 Fathers gathered in Chalcedon during the reign of Marcian, to condemn the teachings of Eutyches and those who supported him. Saint Leo's epistle to Flavian was read at the Fourth Council, and was confirmed by the Holy Fathers as the Orthodox teaching on the incarnate Person of our Lord; it is also called the "Tome of Leo." The Saint wrote many works in Latin; he reposed in 461.'(Great Horologion).

St Leo is remembered for saving Rome from conquest by Attila the Hun. When Attila drew near to Rome, preparing to pillage the city, St Leo went out to him in his episcopal vestments and enjoined him to turn back. For reasons

unknown to worldly historians, the pitiless Attila with all his troops abandoned their attack and returned the way they had come.

Agapetus the Confessor, Bishop of Sinai
Martyrs Victor, Dorotheus, Theodulus and Agrippa
Leo and Paregorius the Martyrs

Day 18-Feb-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 10:23-28; Luke 21:8, 9, 25-27, 33-36;

23 'All things are lawful for me,' but not all things are profitable.
'All things are lawful for me,' but not all things build up.
24 We should not seek our own good, but our neighbor's good.
25 You may eat whatever is sold at the market, asking no question for the sake of conscience, 26 for 'the earth is the Lord's, and its fullness.
c 27 If you are invited for a meal by an unbeliever (and if you are inclined to accept), eat whatever is set before you, asking no questions for the sake of conscience.
d 28 But if anyone says to you, 'This was offered to idols,' do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for the sake of conscience, for 'the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness.

Gospel Reading:

8 Jesus replied, 'Watch out that you do not get led astray, for many will come in my Name, saying: 'I am hed,' and, 'The time is at hand!' Do not follow them! 9 When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified, for these things must happen first, but the end will not come right away.
25 There will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars; and on the earth, the anxiety of nations, perplexed over the roaring of the sea and the waves.
26 People will faint from fear, apprehensive what is coming upon the world, as the powers of the heavens will be shaken.
27 Then, they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.
33 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.
34 And so, be on guard, for fear that your hearts may be weighed down with entertaining distractions, overdrinking, and the worries of this life, and that day will come upon you unexpectedly.
35 For it will come like a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth.
36 Therefore, be watchful all the time, praying that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will happen, and to stand before the Son of Man.
Commemoration of the Departed

Gospel Reading:

1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 ; John 5:24-30 13 We do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, so that you may not grieve like those have no hope do.
14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, in the same way God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.
15 We tell you the following by the word of the Lord: we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will not precede those who have fallen asleep.
16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God.
The dead in Christ will rise first, 17 then we who are alive and remain will be caught upa together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.
And so, we will always be with the Lord.
24 Amen, amen, I tell you; the one who hears my word and believes in him who sent me has eternal life and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.
25 Amen, amen, I tell you; the hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will come to life.
26 For as the Father has life in himself, so has he given to the Son to have life in himself.
27 He also gave him authority to execute judgment, because he is Son of Man.
f 28 Do not be astonished at this, because the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice 29 and come out; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment.
30 I can do nothing of myself.
As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is righteous because I do not seek my own will, but the will of my Father who sent me.

Day 19-Feb-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Apostles Archippus and Philemon of the Seventy, and Martyr Apphia

Archippus was the son of Saints Philemon (Nov. 22) and Apphia (Feb. 15), and, like them, was a disciple of the Apostle Paul, who calls him "our fellow soldier" (Philm. 2). He and his father preached the Gospel at Colossae, and Archippus probably served as a priest for the church that gathered there at his family's house (Col. 4:17). Archippus' fervor in preaching the Gospel of Christ so angered the pagans that they seized him and brought him before the governor Androcles. When the Saint refused to sacrifice to Artemis, he was stripped, beaten, tormented in various ways, and finally stoned to death.

In Luke 10:1-17, the Lord appoints seventy men to go out as missionaries – as apostles. Though not so prominent as the Twelve, the Seventy carried out their missions with fervor and enthusiasm. The Tradition of the Church confirms that the Seventy remained true to the Lord and their calling, fulfilling a vital role in the spread of the gospel. These were not random choices or accidental volunteers but true disciples, true apostles, whose labors carried the message of their Lord throughout the Roman Empire and beyond.

Though lists of the Seventy vary somewhat, all these men are remembered in the calendar of the Church. One day, January 4, is set aside to remember them all, and the record of their work is preserved in accounts handed down through the centuries from place to place, especially in those locations where they labored.

To tell all the stories passed down in the Church concerning the Seventy would fill a book of considerable size, but the stories of a few will convey the conviction and faith of this illustrious body.

Barnabas, a Jew of the tribe of Levi, was born in Cyprus of wealthy parents. He is said to have studied under Gamaliel with Saul of Tarsus, who was to become Paul the apostle. Originally named Joseph, he was called Barnabas (Son of Consolation) by the apostles (Acts 4:36) because he had a rare gift of comforting people’s hearts. He sought out Paul when everyone else was afraid of him, bringing him to the apostles. It was Barnabas whom the apostles first sent to Antioch with Paul. Their long association was broken only when Barnabas was determined to take his cousin Mark, whom Paul did not trust just then, on a missionary journey. The three were later reconciled (Col 4:10). Many ancient

accounts say Barnabas was the first to preach in Rome and in Milan, but he was martyred in Cyprus, then buried by Mark at the western gate of the city of Salamis.

Also among the more prominent of the Seventy was the apostle Titus, whom Paul called his brother (2Co 12:18) and his son (Tts 1:4). Born in Crete, Titus was educated in Greek philosophy, but after reading the prophet Isaiah he began to doubt the value of all he had been taught. Hearing the news of the coming of Jesus Christ, he joined some others from Crete who were going to Jerusalem to see for themselves. After hearing Jesus speak and seeing His works, the young Titus joined those who followed Him. Baptized by the apostle Paul, he worked with and served the great apostle to the Gentiles, traveling with him until Paul sent him to Crete, making him bishop of that city. It is said that Titus was in Rome at the time of the beheading of St. Paul and that he buried the body of his spiritual father before returning home. Back in Crete, he converted and baptized many people, governing the Church on that island until he entered into rest at the age of ninety-four.

Many less prominent among the Seventy also labored for Christ unto death. Aristarchus, whom Paul mentions several times (Acts 19:29; Col 4:10; Phm 24), calling him a 'fellow laborer,' became bishop of Apamea in Syria. Sosthenes (Acts 18:17; 1Co 1:1) became bishop of Caesarea, and Tychicus (Acts 20:4; Eph 6:21; Col 4:7; 2Ti 4:12; Tts 3:12) succeeded him in that city. Simeon (Mt 13:55; Mk 6:3), son of Cleopas (who was the brother of Joseph, the betrothed of the Virgin Mary), succeeded James as bishop of Jerusalem. Aristobulus (Rom 16:10), the brother of the apostle Barnabas, preached the gospel in Britain and died peacefully there.

The live of these few are quite representative of the Seventy, who were instrumental in helping to plant the Church throughout the world. Many became bishops, but the names of all are numbered in heaven in the Book of Life as faithful servants of the Lord, apostles and foundations of the Church.

Source: The Orthodox Study Bible, St. Athanasius Academy of Orthodox Theology, 2008.

Our Venerable Mother Philothea of Athens (1589)

> "This bright star of compassion arose in the dark days of the Turkish occupation to shed God's mercy upon the oppressed people of Athens and to guide many endangered souls onto the path of righteousness." (Synaxarion)
>
> She was born in 1528 to the prominent Venizelou family, miraculously answering her mother's prayer of many years. Though even in childhood she showed a love for ascesis and prayer, she was much sought-after as a wealthy heiress, and was married at the age of twelve to a rough, violent man. She endured his ill-treatment nobly, and prayed daily for his conversion. After three years, the brutal husband died, and Philothea gave herself entirely to a

life of prayer and fasting, living like a hermitess though still in her parents' house. When her parents died ten years later, she used her entire fortune to found a convent. Its design had been given her in a vision by the Apostle Andrew, and it was dedicated to him. Alongside the monastery, she founded a hospital, a hospice for the poor, and schools where boys and girls could receive a Christian education, something obviously not provided by the Turkish rulers.

As soon as the monastery was begun, she took monastic vows under the name of Philothea, and she, her own maidservants, and many young women of the city, became the first nuns there. Philothea continued in her boundless compassion for the poor and infirm, whom she visited and tended. She was so free in her almsgiving that more than once the monastery was left without food or other necessities of life, and the sisters began to complain about her. But each time, large donations appeared unexpectedly and saved the community from starvation.

Philothea offered asylum and refuge to Christian slave women who had fled their masters to preserve their faith and chastity. This angered the Turks, who surrounded the monastery, seized Philothea, and brought her before the judge. She was told to deny Christ or die, and when she refused was sentenced to death; but some influential Athenian Greeks were able to intervene on her behalf and to obtain her release.

Immediately upon her release she redoubled her prayers, her apostolic labors and her works of mercy, and was soon granted the gift of working miracles and healings. So many disciples came to join her that she established a second monastery. Her growing influence aroused the hatred of some of the Turks, who broke into the monastery one night and beat her violently, leaving her half-dead. She bore the effects of her injuries patiently, and after a short time gave back her soul to God in 1589.

Twenty years after her repose, a beautiful scent began to issue from her tomb. Her precious relics, venerated at the Cathedral in Athens, remain incorrupt to this day.

Apolytikion

The famed city of Athens doth honour Philothei, the righteous Martyr, whose relics it now revereth with joy; for while living in sobriety and holiness, she hath exchanged all earthly things for the everlasting life through great contests as a Martyr; and she entreateth the Saviour to grant His mercy unto all of us.

Kontakion

We all honour Philothei with jubilation of spirit, as this day we rev’rently worship her ven’rable relics. For she lived her whole life working kindness and

mercy; and the righteous one, receiving a martyr's ending, is deemed worthy to entreat God that all be granted eternal life with the Saints.

Evgenios and Makarios the Holy Confessors
Conon the Venerable
Nicetas the Athonite and New Martyr

Day 19-Feb-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Sunday of the Last Judgment
1 Corinthians 8:8-9:2; Matthew 25:31-46
8 But food will not commend us to God.
If we do not eat, we are not worse; and if we do eat, we are not better! 9 However, be careful that your freedom may never become a stumbling block to the weak.
10 For if someone sees you who have knowledge sitting in an idol's temple, will not this person's conscience, if weak, be emboldened to eat things sacrificed to idols? 11 And thus, through your knowledge, the weak one perishes, even the brethren for whose sake Christ died.
12 And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ! 13 Therefore, if food causes my brethren to stumble, I will never ever eat meat, so that I may not cause my brethren to stumble.
Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have i not seen Jesus Christ, our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? 2 If to others, I am not an apostle, yet at least for you I am one! You are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

Gospel Reading: Sunday of the Last Judgment

31 'But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory.
32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate them one from another, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.
33 He will place the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.
34 Then, the King will tell those on his right hand, 'Come, you blessed of my Father! Inherit the Kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world! 35 For I was hungry and you gave me food to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you took me in.
36 I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came to me.
37 Then the righteous will answer him, saying: 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you; or thirsty and give you a drink? 38 When did we see you as a stranger and take you in; or naked, and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick, or in prison, and visit you?' 40 The King will answer them, 'Amen, I tell you: as much as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.

41 Then, he will also say to those on his left hand, 'Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels!
42 For I was hungry and you gave me no food; I was thirsty and you gave me no drink; 43 I was a stranger and you did not receive me; naked, and you did not clothe me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit me.
44 Then, they will answer: 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not help you?' 45 Then he will answer them, saying: 'Amen, I tell you: as much as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.
46 These [ones on the left] will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING
'He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats" (Matt.
25: 32) We are now nearing Great Lent where we will be starting the strict fasting season leading up to the events of Christ's passion, crucifixion, burial and physical resurrection.
This is the third in the preparation Sundays before Great Lent.
There's five weeks if you count the Sunday of Zacchaeus which leads into the Triodion.
Each week has a particular lesson and especially to not judge your fellow human beings and to concern yourself with your own sins, humble yourself and repent to be saved.
This Sunday is called the Sunday of the Last Judgment because that is the subject of the Gospel and of all the hymns today.
This day is also Meatfare Sunday, because this is the last day that we eat meat. Next week, we eat dairy and eggs until next Sunday and the day after is Clean Monday and Great Lent begins.
St Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians is linked to the fasting where 'food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse.
' (1 Cor
8: 8). He was responding to the question of whether Christians in his day should eat meat from animals that had been sacrificed to pagan gods.
St Paul thought that the relevant consideration was how eating or not eating that

meat affected other people.
If recent converts from paganism were scandalised by the sight of a Christian eating meat from a pagan temple, that's a sin against one's weaker brother and against Christ.
'Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.
' (1 Cor. 8: 13), as St Paul said.
We fast and do other spiritual disciplines during Lent so that we won't cause others to stumble, so that our passions will be healed by our Lord's mercy and we will then be in a position to become channels of His love to our neighbours.
Our anger tempts other people to anger.
Pride, envy, lust, self-righteousness, gluttony and other passions distort our relationships with other people, even those we love most.
We tempt them to sin because of our infirmities and corruptions.
Today, is about the Son of Man, our Lord Jesus Christ, coming at His Second Coming 'in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.
All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats" (Matt. 25: 31-32). What a frightful image, where all eyes will be on you when you are being judged by the Almighty! This should make us try to be more humble so God will give us wisdom and use fasting and extra prayers to help us with this difficult task.
Even more than this, we ask for God's grace to touch us.
We must live as Christ lived to inherit all the things that our Father has prepared for us.
Christ's First Coming was in bodily form and humble to save the human race but His Second Coming will be from Heaven with glory and wonders to judge it.
Nobody knows when this will be but it will be preceded by certain signs, which some Saints explained in greater detail: Many will come in the name of Christ and deceive many (Matt. 24: 5; Mark 13: 6; Luke 21: 8); There will be wars and rumours of wars between nations and kingdoms (Matt. 24: 6-7; Mark 13: 7-8; Luke 21: 9-10); There will be famines, pestilences and earthquakes and great signs from heaven (Matt. 24: 7-8; Mark 13: 8; Luke 21: 11); Orthodox Christians will be delivered up, killed and hated by all nations (Matt. 24: 9; Mark 13: 9-11; Luke 21: 12-15); Everywhere men will hate and betray each other (Matt. 24: 10; Mark 13: 12-13; Luke 21: 16-17); Many false prophets will appear and deceive many (Matt. 24: 11); The love of many will grow cold and only those who endure to the end will be saved (Matt. 24: 12-13; Mark 13: 13; Luke 21: 19); The Gospel will be preached throughout the world 'for a witness unto all nations' (Matt. 24: 14; Mark 13: 10); After this Jews will become Orthodox Christians (Romans 11: 25-28); Preparations will be made for the coming of Antichrist, called the son of perdition and the beast.
The Antichrist will persecute the true servants of Christ with rage and fury.
The Temple in Jerusalem will be rebuilt for him to be enthroned there in the place

of Christ - hence his name ‘Antichrist’ (Matt. 24: 15-24; Mark 13: 14-22; 2 Thess. 2: 3-11; 1 John 2: 18; Rev. 13: 1-8); Signs will appear in the heavens, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from heaven, the sea and the waves will roar and the powers of heaven will be shaken (Matt. 24: 29; Mark 13: 24-25; Luke 21: 25-26); The sign of the Son of Man (the Cross) will appear in the heavens and then will take place the Second Coming of Christ with power and great glory.

Angels will be sent and shall gather the elect together ‘from the four winds’ (Matt. 24:30-31; Mark 13: 26-27; Luke 21: 27). Therefore, we must be watchful because we don’t know when the end will come for us, whether before or at the Second Coming! Let us weep for our sins and may God help us to prepare for this holy fast and for all of our life.

And to be at the Judgement and stand with the sheep at the right hand of the Lord and not be ashamed with those on His left.

Amen! Fr Demetrianos-Christakis Melekis

Day 20-Feb-2023 Monday

Cheesefare Week, Fast Day (Dairy, Eggs, and Fish Allowed)

St Leo, bishop of Catania in Sicily (~780)

He lived at the time of the first persecutions of the holy icons. He was born in Ravenna to a noble family, and became bishop of his native city. Soon his reputation as a true shepherd of Christ's flock spread, and he was elected Bishop of Catania in Sicily. As is so often true even today, the city, though nominally Christian, was plagued by superstition and paganism. The holy bishop set about to turn the people away from error: by his prayers he caused a pagan temple to collapse and built a church on its site, dedicated to the Forty Maryrs of Sebaste. At that time the entire island was under the oppressive rule of a magus named Heliodorus, who used all his magical skills to oppress the people and advance himself. Though he had been taken captive by Imperial order, and condemned to death, he was always able to escape his captors by his occult skills. Saint Leo, who sought the conversion of everyone, did his best to turn the magus to Christ, but to no effect. One day Heliodorus entered the church during the Divine Liturgy, mocking the Mysteries of Christ. The Saint came out of the sanctuary and, casting his omophorion over the mocker, instantly deprived him of his demonic powers. The Prefect of Sicily ordered the magus to be burnt alive. Bishop Leo went to the stake with him, but emerged unmarked without even the smell of fire upon him, while Heliodorus was burnt to ashes.

Saint Leo's fierceness in defense of the Faith was matched by his love and compassion for the poor and defenseless, for whom he poured himself out unceasingly with prayers, alms and visitation. By his prayers he restored sight to the blind and healed the paralyzed. After his repose, his holy relics, which exuded a fragrant myrrh, were venerated in a church that he had founded in honor of Saint Lucia.

St Bessarion the Great, wonder-worker of Egypt (466)

"An Egyptian by birth, Abba Bessarion was initiated into the angelic life by Saint Anthony the Great. He later became a disciple of Saint Macarius, the founder of Scetis (19 Jan.), and then set out to lead the life of a wanderer, borne hither and thither by Providence like a bird by the wind. All his wealth lay in the Gospel, which he always had in his hand. Living in the open air, he patiently endured all weathers, untroubled by care for a dwelling or for clothing. Fortified by the strength of the faith, he thus remained untouched by all the passions of the flesh.

"On coming to a monastery where the brethren led the common life, he

would sit weeping at the gate. A brother once offered him hospitality and asked why he was distressed. 'I cannot live under a roof, until I have regained the wealth of my house,' he replied, meaning the heavenly inheritance lost since Adam. 'I am afflicted, in danger of death every day, and without rest because of my huge misfortunes, which oblige me ever to travel on in order to finish my course.'

"He wandered for forty years without ever lying down to sleep, and he spent all of forty days and forty nights standing wide awake in a thorn bush. One winter's day, he was walking through a village when he came upon a dead man. Without hesitation, he took off his own coat and covered the body. A little further on, he gave his tunic to a poor man who was shivering in the cold. An army officer, who happened to be passing, saw the naked ascetic and wanted to know who had stripped him of his clothing. 'He did!' replied Bessarion, holding up the Gospel Book. On another occasion, he met with a poor man and, having nothing to give him in alms, he hurried to the market in order to sell his Gospel Book. On his disciple's asking him where the Book was, he replied cheerfully, 'I have sold it in obedience to the words which I never cease to hear: Go, sell what you possess and give to the poor' (Matt. 19:21).

"Through this evangelic way of life he became a chosen vessel of Grace, and God wrought many miracles through him. One day, for example, he made sea water sweet through the sign of the Cross, to quench his disciple's thirst. When the latter wanted to keep some for the remainder of the journey, he prevented him, saying, 'God is here, God is everywhere!' At another time, having stood for two weeks in prayer with hands raised to heaven, he brought about rain enough to fill a thirsty brother's coat. Then there was the time when he stopped the sun from setting until he reached the cell of an elder whom he wished to meet; and the time when he walked across the waters of a river. Through these and many other wonders wrought by the Saint, God showed, as He did with Moses, Joshua and Elias, that He grants His servants mastery even over natural phenomena. Through the power of Christ, he raised a paralytic, drove out demons and showed himself truly to be a 'god' upon the earth.

"When, having reached his goal, he was at the point of regaining that dwelling in heaven which he had sought throughout his wanderings, he said to those about him, 'The monk ought, like the cherubim, to be all eye.'

"In answer to a brother who asked what a monk living in community ought to do, he replied: 'Keep silence and do not measure yourself.' Indeed, this is how even in the midst of people one can obtain the grace of the great anchorites." (Synaxarion)

Thirty-four Holy Martyrs of the Monastery of Valaam (1578)

These thirty-four venerable fathers of the Monastery of the Transfiguration at Valaam on Lake Ladoga were massacred by a party of converts to

Lutheranism who besieged the monastery and attempted to make the brethren renounce the Orthodox Faith.

Saint Agathus, Pope of Rome
Hieromartyr Sadok
Cindeus, Bishop of Pisidia

Day 20-Feb-2023 Monday

Cheesefare Week, Fast Day (Dairy, Eggs, and Fish Allowed)
Readings of the day: 3 John 1:1-14; Luke 19:29-40; 22:7-39
1 The presbyter to Gaius the beloved, whom I love in truth.
2Beloved, I pray that you may flourish in all things and be healthy, even as your soul is flourishing.
3I rejoiced greatly when [some of the] brethren came and testified about your truth, even as you walk in truth.
4 I have no greater joy than this: to hear that my children are walking in truth.
5 Beloved, you do a faithful work in all that you accomplish for those who are brethren and strangers.
6 They have borne witness to your love before the Church.
You will do well to send them forward on their journey in a manner that God would approve, 7 because it is for the sake of the Name that they went out, taking nothing from the Gentiles.
8 For this reason, we should receive such [brethren], so that we may be fellow-workers for the truth.
9 I wrote to the Church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say.
10 Therefore, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds and how he unjustly accuses us with wicked words.
Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brethren.
He also stops those who would do so and throws them out of the Church! 11 Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good.
Whoever does good is of God, but whoever does evil has not seen God.
12 As for Demetrius, he has a good testimony from everyone and of the truth itself; yes, we also testify, and you know that our testimony is true.
b 13 I had many things to write to you, but I am unwilling to write to you with ink and pen.
14 Instead, I hope to see you soon and we will speak face to face.
Peace be to you! The friends greet you.
Greet the friends by name.

Gospel Reading:
29 It so happened that when he approached Bethsphage and Bethany, at the mountain that is called Olive, he sent two of his disciples, 30 saying, 'Go your way

into the village on the other side.
There, as you enter, you will find a colt tied up, on which no one has ever sat.
Untie it, and bring it.
31 If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' reply, 'The Lord needs it!" 32
Those who were sent went away found things exactly as Jesus had told them.
33 As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, 'Why are you untying the colt?' 34 They replied, 'The Lord needs it!' 35 They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt, and set Jesus on them.
36 As he went, they [also] spread their cloaks in the way.
37 As Jesus was now approaching, at the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the deeds of power which they had seen.
38 [They were] saying, 'Blessed is he who is coming, a King in the Name of the Lord!c Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest!' 39 And from the multitude, some of the Pharisees said to Jesus, 'Teacher, rebuke your disciples!' 40 But he answered them, 'I tell you that if these were silent, the stones would cry out!'

Gospel reading:
7 Then, the day of unleavened bread came, on which the Passover must be sacrificed.
8 So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, 'Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat [the Passover meal].
9 They asked him, 'Where do you want us to make preparations?' 10 Jesus replied, 'Behold, when you have entered into the city, a man carrying a pitcher of water will meet you.
Follow him into the house which he enters.
11 Then tell the master of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, 'Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?" 12 He will show you a large, furnished upper room.
Make preparations there.
13 They went, found things as Jesus had told them, and made preparations for the Passover.
14 When the hour had come, he sat down with the Twelve apostles.
15 He said to them, 'With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, 16 for I tell you, I will not eat of it until it is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God.
17 Then, taking a cup and having given thanks, he said, 'Take this, and share it among you, 18 for I tell you, I shall never again drink from the fruit of the vine until the Kingdom of God comes.
19 And having taken bread and given thanks, he broke it and gave [it] to them, saying, 'This is my body which is given for you.
Do this in memory of me.
20 Likewise, he took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in

my blood, which is poured out for you.
21 But behold, the hand of the one who betrays me is with me at the table.
22 The Son of Man indeed is going, as it has been determined, but woe to that man through whom he is betrayed!' 23 Then they began to discuss among themselves which of them it was who would do this thing 24 An argument also arose between them about which one of them was considered to be the greatest.
25 Jesus said to them, 'The kings of the nations have lordship over the people, and those who have authority over peopled are called 'benefactors.
26 But not so with you! Instead, the one who is the greater among you should become as the younger, and the one who is leading as the one who serves.
27 Indeed, who is greater, the one reclining at the table, or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? Yet, I am among you as one who serves.
28 But you are those who have remained with me in my trials, 29 and now I bestow a kingdom upon you, just as my Father bestowed [a kingdom] upon me, 30 so that you may eat and drink at my table in my Kingdom; and you will sit on thrones, judging the Twelve tribes of Israel.
31 And the Lord said, 'Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has asked to have you, so that he might sift you [all] like wheat! 32 But I have prayed for you, that your faith would not fail.
And you, when you have turned back, strengthen your brethren.
33 But Simon said, 'Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death!' 34 At this Jesus replied, 'I tell you, Peter, by the time the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me!' 35 Then Jesus asked them, 'When I sent you out without purse, bag, or sandals, did you lack anything?' They replied, 'Nothing.
36 He then said to them, 'But now, whoever has a purse should take it, and likewise a bag! Whoever has no sword should sell his cloak and buy one! 37 For I tell you that what is written must still be fulfilled in me: 'He was counted with transgressors.
a Indeed, the things [written] concerning me are [reaching] a completion.
38 So the disciples exclaimed, 'Lord, behold, here are two swords!' but he told them, 'That is enough!' 39 Jesus came out, and went, as his custom was, to the Mount of Olives.
His disciples also followed him.

Day 21-Feb-2023 Tuesday

Cheesefare Week, Fast Day (Dairy, Eggs, and Fish Allowed)

St Eustathius, archbishop of Antioch (337)

He was consecrated Bishop of Berea (Aleppo) in Syria, then of Antioch in 324. He took an active part in the Council of Nicea against the Arian heresy. His zeal for the Faith aroused the hatred of various heretics, who convened a council in Antioch where, by means of slanders and false witnesses, they were able to have the holy bishop deposed and exiled to Thrace, where he died a few years later.

The deposition of the Saint caused a schism in the Church of Antioch which was not healed until 414 (see St Meletius, Feb. 12). Saint John Chrysostom publicly praised Eustathius as a Martyr, and his relics were finally brought back to Antioch in 482. The Synaxarion says "The people then went in jubilation to meet him with lights and incense, and escorted him as he made a triumphal entry into his city, which thus recovered its unity in the Faith and in the veneration of this champion of Orthodoxy."

St John the Scholastic, patriarch of Constantinople (577)

He came from the region of Antioch, and only became a clergyman at the age of fifty. He won a wide reputation as representative of the Patriarchate of Antioch at Constantinople, and was elected Patriarch of Constantinople following the deposition of Eutyches in 565. He compiled the Nomocanon, a collection of Church canons, and added the Communion hymn "Of Thy Mystical Supper..." to the Divine Liturgy. He reposed in peace.

Saint Zachariah, Patriarch of Jerusalem (632)

He was the Skevophylax, keeper of the sacred vessels in the Church of Constantinople, then was made Patriarch of Jerusalem in 609. When the Persians took Jerusalem in 614 and took the Precious Cross of our Lord as a trophy, Zachariah went to Persia with the Cross, clasping it in his arms. In 631 the Emperor Heraclius conquered the Persians and recovered the Cross, bringing it to Constantinople. According to one account, Zachariah returned with the Cross, then returned to governing the Church in Jerusalem until his repose in 632 when Modestus (who had been acting in his absence) succeeded him. According to another account, Saint Zachariah died in exile, and Modestus was made Patriarch when the Holy Cross returned to Jerusalem.

Timothy the Righteous

Saint George, Bishop of Amastris

Day 21-Feb-2023 Tuesday

Cheesefare Week, Fast Day (Dairy, Eggs, and Fish Allowed)
Readings of the day: Jude 1:1-10; Luke 22:39-42, 45-23:1
Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to those who are called, sanctified by God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ: 2May mercy, peace and love be multiplied to you.
3 Beloved, while I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I felt it needful to write to you in order to encourage you to fight hard for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.
4 Indeed, there are certain men who have secretly crept in, people whose condemnation was announced long ago.
They are ungodly men who turn the grace of our God into indecency, and they deny our only Master, God, and Lord, Jesus Christ.
5 Even though you already know this, I wish to remind you that the Lord, having saved a people out of the land of Egypt, later on destroyed those who did not believe! 6 The angels who did not keep their first domain but deserted their own dwelling place, he has also kept in darkness and eternal chains for the judgment of the great day.
7 Likewise, Sodom, Gomorrah and the cities around them had given themselves over to sexual immorality and unnatural relations in the same way as these angels. They are presented as an example, suffering the punishment of eternal fire.
8 Yet, these people do the same thing: in their delusion, they degrade the flesh, despise authority, and slander the glorious beings.
9 But the archangel Michael, when he struggled with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring against the devil an evil-speaking judgment, but said, 'May the Lord rebuke you!'g 10 Yet, these people speak evil of things they know nothing about.
What they do understand (by natural power, like the creatures without reason), these things will destroyed them.

Gospel Reading:
39 Jesus came out, and went, as his custom was, to the Mount of Olives.
His disciples also followed him.
40 Having arrived at the place, he said to them, 'Pray that you do not enter into temptation!' 41 He then withdrew from them about a stone's throw [away], knelt down and prayed, 42 saying, 'Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me.

Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.
45 When he rose up from his prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of sheer grief.
46 He said to them, 'Why do you sleep? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation!' 47 While he was still speaking, behold, a multitude [came], and he who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them.
He came near to Jesus to kiss him, 48 but Jesus said to him, 'Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?' 49 When those who were around him saw what was about to happen, they said to him, 'Lord, shall we strike with the sword?'
50 And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear.
51 But Jesus said, 'Let me at least do this'— and he touched the servant's ear, and healed him.
52 Then Jesus said to the chief priests, captains of the temple, and presbyters who had come against him, 'Have you come out as against someone leading a rebellion, with swords and clubs? 53 When I was with you in the temple every day, you did not stretch out your hands against me! But this is your hour, and the power of the darkness.
54 They arrested him and led him away, and brought him into the high priest's house.
But Peter followed from a distance.
55 When people had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter also sat among them.
56 A certain servant girl saw him as he sat in the light, and looking intently at him, she exclaimed, 'This man also was with him!' 57 However, Peter denied Jesus, saying, 'Woman, I do not know him!' 58 A little while later, someone else saw him, and said, 'You also are one of them!' But Peter answered, 'Sir, I am not!' 59 After about one hour had passed, another insisted, saying, 'Truly, this man also was with him, for he is a Galilean!' 60 But Peter said, 'Sir, I do not know what you are talking about!' And immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed.
61 Then the Lord turned, and looked at Peter, and Peter remembered the Lord's word, how he had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.
62 So Peter went out and wept bitterly.
63 Now, the men who held Jesus [in custody] were mocking him and beating him.
64 Having blindfolded him, they struck him on the face and asked him, 'Prophesy! Who is the one who struck you?' 65 They said many other insulting things to him.
66 As soon as it was day, the assembly of the presbyters of the people was gathered, both chief priests and scribes.
They brought Jesus into their council, saying: 67 'If you are the Christ, tell us.
But Jesus said to them, 'If I tell you, you will not believe, 68 and if I question [you], you will not answer me or release me.
69 But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the Power of God.

70 They all asked, 'Are you then the Son of God?' He said to them, 'You say it because I am.
71 Then they exclaimed, 'Why do we need any more witnesses? We ourselves have heard [it] from his own mouth!' Their whole group arose and brought Jesus before Pilate.
2 They began to bring charges against him, saying, 'We have found this man perverting the nation, forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.

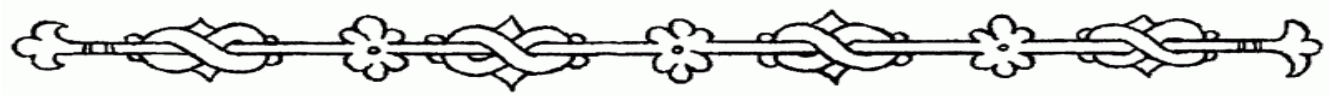
Day 22-Feb-2023 Wednesday

Cheesefare Week, Fast Day (Dairy, Eggs, and Fish Allowed)

Uncovering of the relics of the Holy Martyrs at the gate of Eugenius at Constantinople (395-423)

> "At the time of the holy Patriarch Thomas I of Constantinople (607-610), the relics of some unknown holy Martyrs were discovered buried in the district of Eugenius. As soon as the Patriarch exposed them for the veneration of the people who gathered from all over the city, numerous healings took place.
>
> "Many years had gone by when a clergyman named Nicolas, who worked as a book copyist, learnt by divine revelation that among these anonymous relics were those of Saint Paul's disciples, the holy apostles Andronicus and Junia, who are mentioned in the Epistle to the Romans (16:7). The Emperor Andronicus I (1183-5) built a beautiful church at the place where thise relics were venerated." (Synaxarion)

Holy Martyr Maurice and the Seventy Soldiers with him
Venerable Thalassius and Limnaeus of Syria
Saint Papius of Hierapolis



Day 22-Feb-2023 Wednesday

Cheesefare Week, Fast Day (Dairy, Eggs, and Fish Allowed)
Readings of the day: Joel 2:12-26; Joel 4:12-21

Old Testament Reading: Joel 3:12-21 Let the nations bestir themselves, and come up to the valley of Jehosh'aphat; for there I will sit to judge all the nations round about.
Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe.
Go in, tread, for the wine press is full.
The vats overflow, for their wickedness is great.
Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.
The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.
And the Lord roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth shake.
But the Lord is a refuge to his people, a stronghold to the people of Israel.
'So you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who dwell in Zion, my holy mountain.
And Jerusalem shall be holy and strangers shall never again pass through it.
'And in that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the stream beds of Judah shall flow with water; and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord and water the valley of Shittim.
'Egypt shall become a desolation and Edom a desolate wilderness, for the violence done to the people of Judah, because they have shed innocent blood in their land.
But Judah shall be inhabited for ever, and Jerusalem to all generations.
I will avenge their blood, and I will not clear the guilty, for the Lord dwells in Zion.

Old Testament Reading: Joel 2:12-26 'Yet even now,' says the Lord, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.
Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and repents of evil.
Who knows whether he will not turn and repent, and leave a blessing behind him, a cereal offering and a drink offering for the Lord, your God? Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people.
Sanctify the congregation; assemble the elders; gather the children, even nursing

infants.
Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her chamber.
Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep and say, 'Spare thy people, O Lord, and make not thy heritage a reproach, a byword among the nations.
Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?' Then the Lord became jealous for his land, and had pity on his people.
The Lord answered and said to his people, 'Behold, I am sending to you grain, wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied; and I will no more make you a reproach among the nations.
'I will remove the northerner far from you, and drive him into a parched and desolate land, his front into the eastern sea, and his rear into the western sea; the stench and foul smell of him will rise, for he has done great things.
'Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice, for the Lord has done great things! Fear not, you beasts of the field, for the pastures of the wilderness are green; the tree bears its fruit, the fig tree and vine give their full yield.
'Be glad, O sons of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord, your God; for he has given the early rain for your vindication, he has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the latter rain, as before.
'The threshing floors shall be full of grain, the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.
I will restore to you the years which the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent among you.
'You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, who has dealt wondrously with you.
And my people shall never again be put to shame.

Day 23-Feb-2023 Thursday

Cheesefare Week, Fast Day (Dairy, Eggs, and Fish Allowed)

Hieromartyr Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna (167)

He was born at Ephesus around the year 70. St Irenaeus of Lyons, his disciple, says that St Polycarp was 'a disciple of the Apostles and acquainted with those who had seen the Lord.' His parents died as martyrs, and he was given into the care of a devout lady named Callista. As a child, the Saint was so eager to follow the commandments of Christ that he repeatedly emptied his foster-mother's pantry to feed the poor. Since her supplies were always miraculously renewed, Callista changed his name from Pancratius to Polykarpos, meaning 'Much fruit.'

When grown, Polycarp became a disciple of St John the Theologian, and in time became Bishop of Smyrna; it is told that the messages to the Church at Smyrna in the Book of Revelation are addressed to St Polycarp and his flock. He knew St Ignatius of Antioch personally, and some of their correspondence is preserved.

Polycarp led his Church in holiness for more than fifty years, and became known throughout the Christian world as a true shepherd and standard-bearer of the Faith. About the year 154 he traveled to Rome and consulted with Pope Anacletus on the defense of the Faith.

Not long after he returned to Smyrna, a fierce persecution was unleashed against Christians in Asia Minor; along with many others, St Polycarp was arrested, having predicted his imminent martyrdom. (The account of his martyrdom that follows is based on eyewitness accounts gathered immediately after his death.)

On the evening of Holy Friday, soldiers burst into the farmhouse where he was staying. The Bishop welcomed them cheerfully, and ordered that a meal be prepared for them. He was granted some time to pray, and for two hours stood commemorating everyone that he had known and praying for the Church throughout the world. His captors sorrowed that they had come to take such a venerable man, and reluctantly took him to the Proconsul. When urged to deny Christ and save his life, the aged Saint replied, 'For eighty-six years I

have been his servant, and he has wronged me in nothing; how can I blaspheme my King and Savior?' Told that he would die by fire if he did not apostatize, Polycarp replied 'You threaten me with a fire that burns for a short time and then goes out, while you know nothing of the fire of the judgment to come and of the everlasting torment awaiting the wicked. Why wait any longer? Do what you will!'

Placed on the pyre, Polycarp lifted his eyes heavenward and gave thanks to God for finding him worthy to share with the holy Martyrs of the cup of Christ. When he had said his Amen, the executioners lit the fire. The eyewitnesses write that the fire sprang up around him like a curtain, and that he stood in its midst glowing like gold and sending forth a delightful scent of incense. Seeing that the fire was not harming him, the executioners stabbed him with a sword. His blood flowed so copiously that it put out the fire, and he gave back his soul to God. His relics were burned by the persecutors, but Christians rescued a few fragments of bone, which were venerated for many generations on the anniversary of his repose.

Saint Gorgonia (372)

She was the elder sister of St Gregory the Theologian (Jan. 25), and the daughter of St Gregory Nazianzen the Elder (January 1) and St Nonna (August 5). She married Alypius, a citizen of Iconium, and with him had three daughters. She became a holy guide to countless Christians whose lot it was to live out their Faith in the world. The Synaxarion says, "Her wisdom and knowledge of all that pertains to godliness made her the very model of a Christian wife. Her relatives, fellow-citizens, and numerous strangers relied on her as a counsellor who would indicate the Christian response in any of the knotty problems which they encountered while living in the world. She was foremost in her care for the churches of God, and in her respect for the priests and clergy, to whom the doors of her house were always open. Neither had she her equal in almsgiving nor in compassion for all the afflicted, so that you could well say that, like righteous Job, she was eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, a mother to the orphans."

She received holy Baptism late in life, as was common at that time, and soon afterward the day of her death was revealed to her. She fell ill on the appointed day and, gathering her family and friends around her bed, gave them her final counsels. She then reposed in peace.

Our Venerable Father Alexander the Unsleeping (430)

He was born sometime in the mid-fourth century on an island in the Aegean. For a time he lived successfully in the world, receiving a good education in Constantinople, then serving for a time for the Prefect of the Praetorium. But, becoming aware of the vanity of worldly things, he answered Christ's call, gave away all his goods to the poor and entered a monastery in Syria. After four years in obedience, he came to feel that the security of monastic life was inconsistent with the Gospel command to take no thought for the morrow; so

he withdrew to the desert, taking with him only his garment and the Book of the Gospel. There he lived alone for seven years.

At the end of this period he set out on an apostolic mission to Mesopotamia, where he brought many to Christ: the city prefect Rabbula was converted after Alexander brought down fire from heaven, and a band of brigands who accosted the Saint on the road were transformed into a monastic community. He finally fled the city when the Christians there rose up demanding that he be made bishop. He once again took up a solitary life in the desert beyond the Euphrates, spending the day in prayer and part of the night sheltered in a barrel. There he remained for forty years. His holiness gradually attracted more than four hundred disciples, whom Alexander organized into a monastic community. Each disciple owned only one tunic, and was required to give away anything that they did not need for that day. Despite this threadbare life, the monastery was able to set up and run a hospice for the poor!

Alexander was perplexed as to how the admonition Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17) could be fulfilled by frail human flesh, but after three years of fasting and prayer, God showed him a method. He organized his monks into four groups according to whether their native language was Greek, Latin, Syriac or Coptic, and the groups prayed in shifts throughout the day and night. Twenty-four divine services were appointed each day, and the monks would chant from the Psalter between services. The community henceforth came to be known as the Akoimetoi, the Unsleeping Ones. (Similar communities later sprang up in the West, practicing what was there called Laus Perennis; St Columban founded many of these.)

Always desiring to spread the holy Gospel, Saint Alexander sent companies of missionaries to the pagans of southern Egypt. He and a company of 150 disciples set out as a kind of traveling monastery, living entirely on the charity of the villages they visited. Eventually they settled in some abandoned baths in Antioch, setting up a there a monastery dedicated to the unceasing praise of God; but a jealous bishop drove them from the city. Making his way to Constantinople, he settled there with four monks. In a few days, more than four hundred monks had left their monasteries to join his community. The Saint organized them into three companies — Greeks, Latins and Syrians — and restored the program of unsleeping prayer that his community had practiced in Mesopotamia. Not surprisingly, his success aroused the envy and anger of the abbots whose monasteries had been nearly emptied; they managed to have him condemned as a Messalian at a council held in 426. (The Messalians were an over-spiritualizing sect who believed that the Christian life consisted exclusively of prayer.) Alexander was sent back to Syria, and most of his monks were imprisoned; but as soon as they were released, most fled the city to join him again. The Saint spent his last years traveling from place to place, founding monasteries, often

persecuted, until he reposed in 430, 'to join the Angelic choirs which he had so well imitated on earth.' (Synaxarion)

The practice of unceasing praise, established by St Alexander, spread throughout the Empire. The Monastery of the Akoimetoi, founded by a St Marcellus, a successor of Alexander, was established in Constantinople and became a beacon to the Christian world. 'Even though it has not been retained in today's practice, the unceasing praise established by Saint Alexander was influential in the formation of the daily cycle of liturgical offices in the East and even more so in the West.' (Synaxarion)

Venerable Damian of the Monastery of Esphigmenou on Mount Athos

Polycarp of Briansk

Moses of White Lake

Day 23-Feb-2023 Thursday

Cheesefare Week, Fast Day (Dairy, Eggs, and Fish Allowed)
Readings of the day: Jude 1:11-25; Luke 23:2-34, 44-56
11 Woe to them! They have followed the path of Cain, they have thrown themselves after the error of Balaam for the sake of money, and they have perished in Korah's rebellion.
12 These people are like hidden and rocky reefs in your agape meals, when they feast with you.
They are shepherds who feed themselves without fear, clouds without water carried along by winds, autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, uprooted.
13 They are wild waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of darkness has been reserved to the age.
14 About these people, Enoch, the seventh from Adam, also prophesied, saying:b Behold, the Lord is coming with ten thousands of his holy ones, 15 to execute judgment on all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their works of ungodliness which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.
16 These [people] are grumblers and complainers who pursue their [own] lusts, and their mouth speaks proud things.
They only show respect of persons in order to gain an advantage.
17 As for you, beloved, remember the words which have been spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ.
18 They said to you that 'in the last time there will be mockers, walking after their own ungodly lusts.
19 These [scoffers] are these ones who cause divisions, because they are sensual and deprived of the Spirit.
20 But you, beloved, keep on building yourselves up in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit.
21Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ [that leads] to eternal life.
22 Have compassion on some of them, [but] make a distinction.
c 23 You can save some of them, snatching them out of the fire with fear, yet hating even the clothing stained by what is carnal.
24 Now, to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory in great joy, 25 to God our Savior who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever and unto all ages.
Amen.

Gospel Reading:

23 Their whole group arose and brought Jesus before Pilate.
2 They began to bring charges against him, saying, 'We have found this man perverting the nation, forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.
3 So Pilate questioned him, saying, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' Jesus replied, 'You say it.
4 Pilate said to the chief priests and to the crowd, 'I find no basis for a charge against this man.
5Still, they insisted, saying, 'He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee [and] even to this place.
6 But when Pilate heard Galilee mentioned, he asked if the man was a Galilean.
7 When he found out that Jesus was from Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem during those days.
8 Now, when Herod saw Jesus, he was extremely glad because he had desired to see him for a long time as he had heard many things about him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by him.
9 He questioned Jesus with many words, but Jesus gave no reply.
10 [Meanwhile], the chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him.
11 Then Herod and his soldiers humiliated and mocked Jesus.
b Dressing him in a luxurious robe, they sent him back to Pilate.
12 And Herod and Pilate became friends that very day, [although] before this, they had been enemies.
13 Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people.
14 He said to them, 'You brought this man to me as someone who perverts the people, and behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him.
15 Neither has Herod, for he has sent him back.
As you can see, this man has done nothing worthy of death! 16 Therefore, I will punish him and [then] release him.
17 Now, Pilate had to release one prisoner to them at the feast.
a 18 But they all cried out together, saying, 'Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!'19 This one had been thrown into prison for a certain rebellion in the city, and for murder.
20 Then Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus.
21But they shouted, saying, 'Crucify! Crucify him!' 22 For the third time, Pilate said to them, 'Why? What evil has this man done? I have found no reason for death in him.
I will therefore chastise him and release him.

23 But they were insistent with loud voices, demanding that Jesus be crucified.
And their shouts and the shouts of the chief priests prevailed.
24 So Pilate decreed that what they were asking for should be done.
25 He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, as the people had requested.
But Jesus, he delivered up to their will.
26 As the soldiers were leading Jesus away, they seized Simon, a Cyrenian [who was] coming from the countryside.
They laid the cross on him, to carry it after Jesus.
27 A great multitude of the people followed him, including women who also mourned and lamented him.
28 But Jesus, turning to them, said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me! Instead, weep for yourselves and for your children! 29 For behold, the days are coming in which people will say, 'Blessed are the barren, the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.
30 Then, people will begin to tell the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to tell the hills, 'Cover us.
d 31 For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will be done when it is dry?' 32 There were also others, two criminals, [who were] led with him to be put to death 33 When they arrived to the place which is called The Skull, the soldiers crucified him there with the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left.
34 Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.
a 44 It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour.
45 The sun was darkened, and the veil of the sanctuary was torn in two.
46 Crying with a loud voice, Jesus said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!' Having said this, he breathed his last.
47 When the centurion saw what had taken place, he glorified God, saying, 'Certainly, this was a righteous man.
48 When all the multitudes that had come together to see this saw what had happened, they returned home beating their breasts.
49 But all those who knew Jesusa and the women who had followed with him from Galilee stood at a distance, watching these things.
50 And now, there was a man named Joseph, who was a member of the council, a good and righteous man 51 (who had not consented to their counsel and deed).
He was from Arimathaea, a city of the Jews, and he was also waiting for the Kingdom of God.
52 This man went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body.
53 He took it down, wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that was cut in stone, where no one had ever been laid.
54 It was the [day of the] Preparation, and the Sabbath was drawing near.
55 The women who had come with Jesus out of Galilee followed [Joseph] and saw the tomb, and how his body was laid.

56 They returned [home], and prepared spices and ointments.
On the Sabbath, they rested according to the commandment.

Day 24-Feb-2023 Friday

Cheesefare Week, Fast Day (Dairy, Eggs, and Fish Allowed)

First (4th c.) and Second (9th c.) Findings of the Precious Head of St John the Baptist

After the Forerunner was beheaded at the order of Herod and his illicit wife Herodias, his head was discarded in what the Synaxarion calls "an unseemly location," presumably a privy. According to some, it was secretly recovered by Joanna, one of the Myrrhbearing women, and given honorable burial near Jerusalem. There it was found, through a revelation of the Forerunner, by two monks who had come to Jerusalem to worship at the tomb of our Savior (the first finding). Putting the head in a bag, the monks returned home. On the way, they met an indigent potter from Emesa. That night the Forerunner appeared to the poor man and instructed him to make off with the relic. He returned with it to Emesa and immediately began to prosper in his business. Just before he died, he put the holy relic in a chest, which he left to his sister with these instructions: never to open it without instructions from the one hidden inside it; and to pass it on to a pious man beloved of God. Thus the Head of the Baptist passed through many generations, eventually being concealed in a cave near a monastery founded during the reign of Marcian (450-457), whose abbot was the godly Marcellus.

The blessed Forerunner appeared several times to Marcellus, embracing him and once even giving him a pot of honey. The Baptist ordered Marcellus to follow a star which led him to the cave and came to rest in front of a niche in the wall. Marcellus dug there and came upon a marble slab, under which was a large jar containing the precious Head. The holy relic was taken with rejoicing to the cathedral in Emesa,where it worked many wonders. In the reign of Michael III (842-867), it was taken to Constantinople. It was at this translation that the present Feast was instituted.

The version given here is that of St Symeon Metaphrastes. Other sources give substantially different accounts.

The Prologue observes: "It is important and interesting to note that, while he was alive, John did not work a single miracle (Jn 10:41), but to his relics was given the blessed power of working miracles."

Saint Aethelberht (Ethelbert), first Christian King of Kent (616)

In 597, a party of forty missionary monks, led by St Augustine of Canterbury (May 28), was sent to Britain by the holy Pope Gregory the Great, to bring the blessed Gospel of Jesus Christ to the English people. Aethelberht, who had been King of Kent for thirty-six years, received the monks favorably, allowed them to preach in his kingdom, and invited them to establish their headquarters in Canterbury, his capital city, which already contained a small, ruined church dedicated to St Martin of Tours in Roman times.

The king himself was converted and received holy Baptism at the hands of St Augustine; a crowd of his subjects followed his example. When St Augustine was consecrated bishop, Aethelberht allowed him to be made Archbishop of Canterbury and gave his own palace to serve as a monastery. The king worked steadily for the conversion of the neighboring kindoms, and in 604 established an episcopal see in London. Unlike some Christian rulers, he refused to see anyone converted forcibly.

Saint Aethelberht reposed in peace in 616, after reigning for fifty-six years. He was buried in the Church of Saints Peter and Paul, which he had established. Many miracles were worked at his tomb, where a lamp was kept lit perpetually until the monastery was disbanded by the Protestants in 1538.

Venerable Erasmus of the Kiev Caves

Saint Romanos, Prince of Uglich

Day 24-Feb-2023 Friday

Cheesefare Week, Fast Day (Dairy, Eggs, and Fish Allowed)
Readings of the day: Zechariah 8:7-14; Zechariah 8:19-23

Old Testament Reading: Zechariah 8:7-17 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: Behold, I will save my people from the east country and from the west country; and I will bring them to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; and they shall be my people and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness.
Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Let your hands be strong, you who in these days have been hearing these words from the mouth of the prophets, since the day that the foundation of the house of the Lord of hosts was laid, that the temple might be built.
For before those days there was no wage for man or any wage for beast, neither was there any safety from the foe for him who went out or came in; for I set every man against his fellow.
But now I will not deal with the remnant of this people as in the former days, says the Lord of hosts.
For there shall be a sowing of peace; the vine shall yield its fruit, and the ground shall give its increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things.
And as you have been a byword of cursing among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so will I save you and you shall be a blessing.
Fear not, but let your hands be strong.
For thus says the Lord of hosts: 'As I purposed to do evil to you, when your fathers provoked me to wrath, and I did not relent, says the Lord of hosts, so again have I purposed in these days to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah; fear not.
These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another, render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace, do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath, for all these things I hate, says the Lord.

Old Testament Reading: Zechariah 8:19-23 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah seasons of joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; therefore love truth and peace.
'Thus says the Lord of hosts: Peoples shall yet come, even the inhabitants of many

cities; the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, 'Let us go at once to entreat the favor of the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts; I am going.
Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to entreat the favor of the Lord.
Thus says the Lord of hosts: In those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.

Day 25-Feb-2023 Saturday

Cheesefare Week, Fast Day (Dairy, Eggs, and Fish Allowed)

St Tarasios, archbishop of Constantinople (806)

He was a nobleman born in Constantinople, and distinguished himself in a secular career, rising in the year 780 to the rank of protasecretis, Principal Secretary of State to the Emperor Constantine VI and his mother the Empress Irene, who was serving as regent.

His life took a sudden turn when, in 784, Patriarch Paul IV resigned, recommending Tarasios as the only man capable of restoring the Patriarchate, ravaged by the iconoclast heresy, to true Faith and full communion with the other Patriarchates. Tarasios, though unwilling, was virtually forced to accept the Patriarchate by the rulers and the Senate: he agreed at last on condition that an Ecumenical Council be summoned immediately to put an end to the iconoclast heresy. In a few days he was raised from a layman through all the degrees of the clergy and on December 25 784, was consecrated Archbishop of Constantinople.

At Saint Tarasios' insistence, the Imperial rulers summoned a Church Council, whch met at Constantinople in 786. Before its sessions had even begun, iconoclasts burst into the church and drove out the Fathers, who were forced to reconvene in Nicaea, where the first session opened. Patriarch Tarasios presided, and the Council concluded with a condemnation of the iconoclast heresy and the restoration of veneration of the holy images.

As Archbishop, the Saint was a model of humility, compassion, and firmness in the Faith. He refused to have any servants and dressed simply, a living rebuke to the luxury that had corrupted the clergy at that time. His works of charity were so great that he became known to the people as 'the new Joseph': he founded hospices and shelters, distributed the Church's wealth freely to the poor, and often invited the poor to his own table to share his simple fare. He insisted on exercising all gentleness and mercy in restoring repentant heretics to the Church, a policy that met with opposition from the more severe leaders of the Studion monastery. At the same time he was unbending in the defense of the Faith: when the Emperor Constantine came of age he repudiated his wife Mary in order to marry Theodota, one of her servants. The Patriarch refused to bless the adulterous union and threatened the Emperor with excommunication if he persisted in sin. The Emperor had Tarasios imprisoned, forced his licit wife to enter a monastery, and found a priest, Joseph, to bless his second marriage. The following year Constantine was blinded and dethroned, and Tarasios regained his freedom.

The holy Patriarch continued to serve his Church faithfully, occupying the episcopal throne for a total of twenty-six years. In his last years, despite a long and painful illness, he continued to serve the Divine Liturgy daily, supporting himself with his staff. In the year 806, serving at the altar, he began to chant from Psalm 85, Bow down thine ear, O Lord, and hear me, and gave up his soul to God.

"In 820, the Emperor Leo the Armenian, who for seven years had supported the iconoclasts and had fiercely persecuted the Orthodox, had a disturbing dream. He saw a stern-looking Saint Tarasius ordering a man by the name of Michael to run Leo himself through with a sword. Six days later, Leo was in fact assasinated by Michael the Stammerer, who seized power... In physical appearance, Saint Tarasius is said to have closely resembled Saint Gregory the Theologian." (Synaxarion)

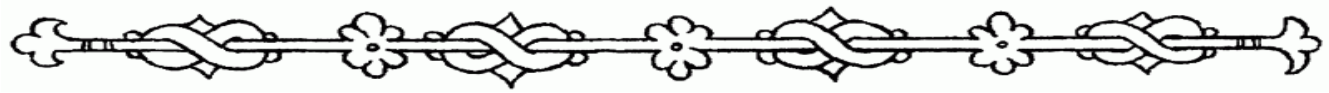
Hieromartyr Reginos, Bishop of Skopelos
Venerable Paphnutius of Kephala
Blessed Theodore, Fool-for-Christ

Day 25-Feb-2023 Saturday

Cheesefare Week, Fast Day (Dairy, Eggs, and Fish Allowed)
Readings of the day: Romans 14:19-23; 16:25-27; Matthew 6:1-13
19 And so, let us pursue things which cause peace, and things by which we may edify one another.
20 Do not overthrow God's work for the sake of food! All things indeed are clean; however it is evil for someone to create a stumbling block by eating.
21 It is good to not eat meat, drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles, is offended, or is made weak.
22 Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God.
Blessed is the one who does not judge himself in what he approves.
23 But the one who doubts is condemned if by eating, it is not of faith.
Whatever is not of faith is sin.
24 Now to him who is able to establish you according to my Good News and the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret through long ages 25 but is now revealed, and who by the Scriptures of the prophets (according to the commandment of the eternal God,) is made known for obedience of faith to all the nations; 26 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be glory forever! Amen.

Gospel Reading:
Be careful not to make your charitable giving before other people, with the intention to be seen by them.
If you do so, you have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.
2 Therefore, when you do merciful deeds, do not sound a trumpet before yourself, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets in order to receive glory from men.
Amen, I tell you: they have [already] received their reward.
3 But when you do merciful deeds, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your merciful deeds may be in secret.
Then your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you openly.
5 When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and in the street corners, in order to be seen by men.
Amen, I tell you: they have [already] received their reward! 6 But you, when you pray, enter into your inner room, and having shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret.
Then your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

7 When you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard on account of their many words.
8 Therefore, do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need even before you ask him.
9 Pray like this:
'Our Father who are (art) in heaven, hallowed be your (thy) Name.
10 Your (Thy) Kingdom come, your (thy) will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
11 Give us this day our daily bread and
12 forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors.
13 And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.
For yours (thine) is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory, now and unto ages of ages.
Amen



Day 26-Feb-2023 Sunday

Cheesefare Week, Fast Day (Dairy, Eggs, and Fish Allowed)

St Porphyrius, bishop of Gaza (420)

He was born to a wealthy, noble family in Thessalonica around 347. Filled more and more with a yearning for God, he abandoned his worldly possessions and traveled to Egypt, living for five years as a monk at Sketis. From there he went to Palestine, where he lived for another five years in a cave in the Jordan desert. Suffering from a severe ailment, he was forced to move to Jerusalem; there he was suddenly and completely cured following a vision on Golgotha, in which he saw the Good Thief come down from the cross to lead him to Christ, who gave the Cross into his keeping.

Porphyrius took up the trade of a shoemaker in Jerusalem to provide for his few needs. His humility and charity became so well-known that the Bishop of Jerusalem ordained him to the priesthood at the age of forty-five, and made him Stavrophylax, keeper of the True Cross of the Savior — thus fulfilling Porphyrius' vision on Golgotha. Three years later, much against his will, he was elected Bishop of Gaza.

Throughout his episcopate he was persecuted by the pagans who still dominated the life of that city — though he was able to convert many of them by his own example of holiness, and by the many miracles that were wrought through his intercessions. Once, when the city was suffering from a long drought, the Saint gathered the city's Christians (who numbered no more than 280), told them to fast, and celebrated an all-night vigil. The next morning, as the Bishop and his entire flock went in procession through the city it began to rain. At this, 127 pagans were converted. When the pagans' violent attacks continued, Porphyrius appealed to the Emperor Arcadius for an edict closing of the pagan temples in Gaza. With the support of St John Chrysostom the edict was issued. When the Imperial representatives entered Gaza, accompanied by Bishop Porphyrius bearing the Cross, the statue of Aphrodite in the city's main temple shattered into pieces. Eight temples were destroyed, and a Church was built on the site of the largest. Hundreds of pagans embraced the Faith and, after instruction, were baptized by the Saint.

After twenty-five years as bishop, during which he had seen his see transformed from a small flock of beleaguered Christians into a Christian territory, Saint Porphyrius reposed in peace in 420.

St Photini the Samaritan Woman, and those with her (66)

She was the Samaritan Woman who met Christ at Jacob's Well (John ch. 4). She repented, and told her townsmen that she had met the Christ, for which

she is sometimes called the first to proclaim the Gospel of Christ. She converted her four sisters (Phota, Photis,Parasceva, and Cyriaca), and her sons (Victor and Joses), and all of them became tireless evangelists for Christ. After the martyrdom of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, she traveled to Carthage to proclaim the Gospel there. She, with her Christian sisters and sons, all met martyrdom under the persecutions of Nero. She is also commemorated on the Sunday of the Samaritan Woman during the Paschal season.
New Martyr John Calphas at Constantinople
Theoclitus the Martyr

Day 26-Feb-2023 Sunday

Cheesefare Week, Fast Day (Dairy, Eggs, and Fish Allowed)

Sunday of Forgiveness (Cheesefare Sunday)
Romans 13:11-14:4; Matthew 6:14-21
11 Do this, being aware of the time: it is already time for you to awaken from sleep,
for salvation is now nearer to us than when we first believed! 12 The night is far
gone, and the day is near.
Let us therefore throw off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of
light.
13 Let us walk decently, as in the day; not in parties and drunkenness, not in
sexual immorality and lustful acts, and not in strife or jealousy.
14 Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ and do not think how to satisfy the flesh
and its lusts.
Accept the one who is weak in faith, but not to enter into arguments over
disputable matters.
2One has faith to eat all things while the weak eats only vegetables.
3The one who eats [everything] should not look down on the one who does not
eat.
The one who does not eat should not judge the one who eats because God has
accepted him.
4Who are you who judge someone else's servant? He stands or falls to his own
master! Yes, that one will be made [able] to stand, because God has the power to
make someone stand.

Gospel Reading: Sunday of Forgiveness (Cheesefare Sunday)

14 For if you forgive people their offences, your heavenly Father will also forgive
you.
15 But if you do not forgive people their offences, neither will your Father forgive
your offences.
16 Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites with their gloomy faces.
For they disfigure their faces so that people may see that they are fasting.
Amen, I tell you: they have received their reward.
17 But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face 18 so that people
may not see that you are fasting.
Only your Father who is in secret will see, and your Father, who sees in secret, will
reward you.

19 Do not store up treasures for yourselves on the earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal.
20 Instead, store for yourselves treasures in heaven,a where neither moth nor rust consume, and where thieves do not break in and steal.
21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

SERMON ON THE EPISTLE READING
In today's Epistle, Saint Paul focuses on the necessity for us to exercise self-control in our spiritual lives, and to be watchful as 'salvation is nearer now than when we became believers.
' It should not surprise us, on Forgiveness Sunday, with Clean Monday falling tomorrow, that the Church should have chosen this passage to remind us of the ascetical endeavours of the Lenten period, how we should go about those endeavours, and how we should interact with others.
St Paul exhorts us to flee sin, and instead to put on Christ - the Light of the world, to return to the illumined state we experienced at our baptism, and to prepare ourselves for spiritual struggle, by 'putting on the armour of light".
St Paul does not flinch in telling us which are 'the works of darkness" we should be avoiding and overcoming: 'revelling… drunkenness… debauchery… licentiousness… quarrelling and jealousy", all of which, like any sin, cause us to miss the mark and turn away from Christ.
Instead he urges us to 'put on the Lord Christ, and make no provision for the flesh", and in doing so is not telling us to avoid the necessities we require to survive in following Christ, but rather to avoid excesses, and the sinful and distorted misuse of those necessities.
Having guided us as to how to conduct our own ascetic life, St Paul considers how we should interact with others, and their ascetic struggles.
He notes we 'should welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for quarrelling over opinions".
We are called to support those who are struggling in their faith and uphold them in love, avoiding, as we discover later in the passage, looking down or judging others for their ascetic efforts or lack of those efforts.
St Paul is aware, as in our own time, that there are those who will fast, and those who will not, and this may be due to a whole host of reasons.
He notes, 'Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgement on those who eat; for God has welcomed them".
This is a clear urging by St Paul to avoid judging others who are answerable for their own life before Christ, and instead to show them love, and to respect their

devotion and their being made in the image of God.
As we enter the period of Lent, let us offer a fast acceptable to God, and may each of us engage in the ascetic life according to the strength God has given us.
Let us avoid taking an interest in the fasting of others, judging their efforts and spiritual lives, and instead think the best of our fellow Christians.
If we judge others, it simply undermines our own fast, as fasting is not simply about food and our own actions, but also about what we think about others, and what we say to them.
As St John Chrysostom says, 'For what does it profit if we abstain from fish and fowl and yet bite and devour our brothers and sisters?' In own our fasting let us avoid worrying about hospitality from those who are unaware that we are fasting, avoid being over-fastidious with reading food labels, ask for advice from our priest if our health or circumstances making fasting difficult, and if we stumble on our Lenten path, get up and carry on asking for forgiveness.
After all, to paraphrase the Gospel, fasting was made for man, not man for fasting.
Alongside our various forms of ascetic activity, let us also take the opportunity to help our neighbour through charity, to forgive those around us, to confess our sins to a priest, to read a spiritual book, or to attend the plethora of extra services that are celebrated at this time.
As we follow Christ towards his Passion and Holy Resurrection, let us, through our participation in this Lenten season, enter ever more deeply into our life in Christ, conform ever closer to his image and likeness, and having reached the end of a blessed and well-struggled Lent, enjoy a glorious celebration of Pascha.
Kalo Stadio! Printed by Athina Press Oeconomos Gregory Wellington

Day 27-Feb-2023 Monday

Great Lent begins, Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Our Holy Father Procopius of Decapolis (9th c.)

He was from Decapolis near the Sea of Galilee, and entered monastic life as a youth. When the Emperor Leo the Isaurian began his persecution of the holy icons, Procopius, who had previously spent his life in hiddenness and silence, boldly stood forth to defend the true Orthodox veneration of the icons. For this he was cruelly tortured and imprisoned. When the cruel Leo died and the icons were restored to the churches, Procopius returned to his monastery, where he lived in peace to a great old age. The Prologue concludes, 'In old age, he entered into God's Kingdom, where he beheld with joy the living angels and saints whose images were on the honoured icons on earth.'

St Raphael, bishop of Brooklyn (1915)

He was born in Syria in 1860, in the waning years of the Ottoman Empire. In his childhood, his family took refuge in Lebanon after their parish priest, St Joseph of Damascus (July 10) was martyred; but they later returned to Damascus. In 1879 he was tonsured a monk and entered into the service of Patriarch Hierotheos of Antioch. The Balamand Seminary had been closed since 1840, but the young monk was offered a scholarship at the Constantinople Patriarchate's seminary at Halki. Returning to Syria with a theological degree, St Raphael became assistant to Gerasimos, the new Patriarch of Antioch, traveling and preaching on his behalf. After further studies in Kiev, he transferred to the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Moscow and for a time was professer of Arabic studies at the Theological Academy in Kazan. (At that time the downtrodden Orthodox of the Middle East received considerable aid and theological training from the Tsar and from the Church in Russia).

In 1895 he was sent to the United States to shepherd the Arab Orthodox Community in New York, which was without a church or a priest. He quickly consecrated a chapel and with great energy set about the work of shepherding his flock there; but he was concerned not only for them but for the Arab Christian immigrants scattered through North America, most of whom were without a pastor and in danger of falling into heterodoxy or abandoning religious life. He traveled widely throughout the continent, visiting, counseling and serving Arab Christians, preaching, celebrating marriages and baptisms, receiving confessions and celebrating the Divine Liturgy, usually in private houses. In 1898 he published the first Orthodox prayer book in Arabic to appear in the New World. In 1899, he made a seven-month journey through

forty-three American cities, seeking out the "scattered sheep" of the Church in America. His services were attended not only by Arabs but by Russians and Greeks, all of whom at that time depended on the Russian mission to North America. During this entire period, he held the official rank of Archimandrite, though his work and duties exceeded those of most bishops.

In 1901, Patriarch Meletios was elected to the see of Antioch, the first Arab to occupy the patriarchal throne for 168 years. Several proposals were made to elect Archimandrite Raphael to a see in Syria; but he refused all such offers, pointing out the Orthodox people's great and little-met needs in North America. In 1904, the Moscow Patriarchate made him Bishop of Brooklyn, the first Orthodox bishop to be consecrated on American soil. He redoubled his already impressive pastoral work, ordaining priests to the many new parishes that he had founded, and assisting Saint Tikhon (then Bishop of North America) in the care of his huge diocese. In 1905 he laid the foundation of the Monastery of St Tikhon in Pennsylvania.

The bishop saw the importance of integrating the faithful into the life of their new homeland, and was an early advocate of the use of English in American Church services. When Isabel Hapgood's Service Book — the first useful English translation of the Church's services — was published in 1906, he advocated its use in all his parishes.

In 1912, St Raphael was found to be suffering from heart disease, but continued his exhausting pastoral work for two more years. In 1915 he was finally unable to continue, and reposed after two months' illness.

When his relics were transported in 1998 from Brooklyn to Antiochian Village in Ligonier, PA, they were found to be incorrupt, and in 2000 he became the most recently glorified Saint of North America.

In North America St Raphael is commemorated on the anniversary of his repose: February 27 on the Civil/New Calendar, February 14 on the Julian Calendar. He is also commemorated with the Synaxis of Saints of North America on the Second Sunday after Pentecost. The Patriarchate of Antioch also commemorates him, but on Saturday before the Synaxis of the Archangels (November 8).

Our Venerable Father Titus of the Lavra of the Kiev Caves (1190)

Titus and Evagrius, two monks in the famed Kiev Caves Lavra, were dear friends who, through the instigation of the demons, allowed a disagreement to descend into mutual enmity. Despite the efforts of their brother monks to reconcile them, their mutual hatred grew, to the extreme that when one of them censed the church, the other would turn and walk out.

Titus fell gravely ill and, feeling that his end was near, at last repented and asked that Evagrius come and be reconciled with him. Evagrius was unwilling, but the other monks brought him by bodily force to his brother's bedside. Titus fell at his feet and said 'Forgive me for having offended and wounded you in my anger. Bless me!' Evagrius, unmoved, shouted 'I will never forgive him,

neither in this world nor in the next!' As soon as he had uttered these words he suddenly fell down dead. Titus, on the other hand, rose up, completely cured of his illness. He told his brethren that he had seen a spear come down from heaven and strike Evagrius, and that the spear had then touched and healed him; and that the swarms of demons who had been terrifying him as he lay dying, vanished at the moment he asked Evagrius to forgive him. Saint Titus spent the rest of his days in repentance and love, and fell asleep in peace around 1190.

Our Holy Father Leander, Bishop of Seville and Apostle of Spain (600)

He was born to an aristocratic Roman family living in Spain: his father Severian was Duke of Cartagena. Saint Leander embraced monastic life as a young man in Seville, capital of the Visigoths, who had embraced Arianism and caused the Arian heresy to dominate throughout Spain. Leander became a leading figure in the struggle to restore his land to Orthodoxy, founding a school in Seville to promote the Orthodox faith. In 583 he travelled to Constantinople to seek the Emperor's support for the Spanish Orthodox; while there he met St Gregory the Great (the future Pope of Rome), with whom he formed a lifelong friendship. On his return to Spain, Leander was made Bishop of Seville.

One of the holy bishop's converts was Hermengild, one of the sons of the Arian king Leovigild. When Hermengild rose up against his father in the name of Orthodoxy, Leovigild launched a violent persecution of the Orthodox throughout his kingdom. (Leovigild had his son imprisoned, then executed on Pascha Day of 586.) By God's grace, at the very height of the persecution Leovigild fell mortally ill, repented, and embraced the true Faith; at his urging his son and successor Recared converted to Orthodoxy and convened the Third Council of Toledo in 589, at which he proclaimed that the Gothic and Suevic peoples were returning to the unity of the One Church. Saint Leander presided at the Council, and devoted the rest of his life to educating the (mostly) newly-Orthodox people of Spain in the Faith. It was he who established the early form of the Mozarabic Liturgy. He reposed in peace on March 13, 600. (He is venerated on this day because his name was incorrectly placed on February 27 in the Roman Martyrology.

Venerable Thalelaeus of Syria

Venerable Stephen of Constantinople

Holy Martyr Julian

Gelasios the Actor of Heliopolis

Timothy of Caesarea

Day 27-Feb-2023 Monday

Great Lent begins, Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Isaiah 1:1-20; Genesis 1:1-13; Proverbs 1:1-20

Old Testament Readings: Isaiah 1:1-20 The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzzi'ah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezeki'ah, kings of Judah.
Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord has spoken: 'Sons have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me.
The ox knows its owner, and the ass its master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people does not understand.
Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, sons who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged.
Why will you still be smitten, that you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint.
From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and bleeding wounds; they are not pressed out, or bound up, or softened with oil.
Your country lies desolate, your cities are burned with fire; in your very presence aliens devour your land; it is desolate, as overthrown by aliens.
And the daughter of Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard, like a lodge in a cucumber field, like a besieged city.
If the Lord of hosts had not left us a few survivors, we should have been like Sodom, and become like Gomor'rah.
Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom! Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomor'rah! 'What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of he-goats.
'When you come to appear before me, who requires of you this trampling of my courts? Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me.
New moon and sabbath and the calling of assemblies — I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.
Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them.
When you spread forth your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.
Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from

before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.
'Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.
If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; But if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.
Genesis 1:1-13 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.
And God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light.
And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.
God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.
And there was evening and there was morning, one day.
And God said, 'Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.
And God made the firmament and separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament.
And it was so.
And God called the firmament Heaven.
And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.
And God said, 'Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.
And it was so.
God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas.
And God saw that it was good.
And God said, 'Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, upon the earth.
And it was so.
The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind.
And God saw that it was good.
And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.
Proverbs 1:1-20 The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: That men may know wisdom and instruction, understand words of insight, receive instruction in wise dealing, righteousness, justice, and equity; that prudence may be given to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth — the wise man also may hear and increase in learning, and the man of understanding acquire skill, to understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles.
The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and

instruction.
Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and reject not your mother's teaching; for they are a fair garland for your head, and pendants for your neck.
My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent.
If they say, 'Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood, let us wantonly ambush the innocent; like Sheol let us swallow them alive and whole, like those who go down to the Pit; we shall find all precious goods, we shall fill our houses with spoil; throw in your lot among us, we will all have one purse' — my son, do not walk in the way with them, hold back your foot from their paths; for their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood.
For in vain is a net spread in the sight of any bird; but these men lie in wait for their own blood, they set an ambush for their own lives.
Such are the ways of all who get gain by violence; it takes away the life of its possessors.
Wisdom cries aloud in the street; in the markets she raises her voice.

Day 28-Feb-2023 Tuesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Blessed Nicholas of Pskov, fool for Christ (1576)

"A rare fearlessness is a characteristic of fools for Christ. Blessed Nicholas ran through the streets of Pskov, pretending madness, rebuking people for their secret sins and foretelling what would happen to them. When Tsar Ivan the Terrible entered Pskov, the whole town was in fear and dread of the terrible Tsar... The Tsar, learning about this blessed man, who and what he was, visited him in his tiny room. [Ivan was a great lover of external piety.] It was the first week of the Great Fast. Hearing that the Tsar was coming to visit him, Nicholas found a piece of raw meat and, when the Tsar entered his cell, Nicholas bowed and offered the meat to the Tsar. 'Eat, little Ivan, eat!' The terrible Tsar answered him furiously: 'I am a Christian, and do not eat meat in the Fast.' Then the man of God retorted, 'You do that and worse; you feed on men's flesh and blood, forgetting not only the Fast but God as well.' This lecture entered deeply into the heart of Tsar Ivan, and he immediately left Pskov in shame, having intended to wreak great slaughter there." (Prologue)

Holy New Martyr Kyranna (1751)

This pious and beautiful maiden lived in a village near Thessalonica. One day a Janissary, come to collect taxes, laid eyes on her and was struck by lust. When she refused his advances, the wicked official brought her before the judge in Thessalonica and, using other soldiers as false witnesses, said that she had agreed to marry him and to convert to Islam. To all these claims Kyranna replied, 'I am a Christian, and I have no bridegroom but Christ, to whom I have offered my maidenhood as a dowry. Him I love and for Him I am ready to shed my blood! That is my answer; expect no other from me.' Having said this, she 'enclosed herself in silence' (Synaxarion) and would testify no more. She was cast into prison, where she was tormented and finally beaten to death by her jailer. When she died, a divine Light surrounded her and illumined the entire prison. When news of the miracle spread, the shamed Turkish officials handed over her body to Christians, who laid it to rest outside the city.

Saint Basil the Confessor
Hieromartyr Nestor of Pamphylia
Saint Arsenius, Metropolitan of Rostov
Nymphas and Eubulus the Holy Apostles

Day 28-Feb-2023 Tuesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Isaiah 1:19-2:3; Genesis 1:14-23; Proverbs 1:20-33

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 1:19-2:3
'If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.
How the faithful city has become a harlot, she that was full of justice!
Righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers.
Your silver has become dross, your wine mixed with water.
Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves.
Every one loves a bribe and runs after gifts.
They do not defend the fatherless, and the widow’s cause does not come to them.
Therefore the Lord says, the Lord of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel: 'Ah, I will vent my wrath on my enemies, and avenge myself on my foes.
I will turn my hand against you and will smelt away your dross as with lye and remove all your alloy.
And I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning.
Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city.
Zion shall be redeemed by justice, and those in her who repent, by righteousness.
But rebels and sinners shall be destroyed together, and those who forsake the Lord shall be consumed.
For you shall be ashamed of the oaks in which you delighted; and you shall blush for the gardens which you have chosen.
For you shall be like an oak whose leaf withers, and like a garden without water.
And the strong shall become tow, and his work a spark, and both of them shall burn together, with none to quench them.
The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.
It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.
For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 1:14-23 And God said, 'Let there be lights in the

firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth.
And it was so.
And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; he made the stars also.
And God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness.
And God saw that it was good.
And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.
And God said, 'Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the firmament of the heavens.
So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind.
And God saw that it was good.
And God blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.
And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

Old Testament Reading: Proverbs 1:20-33 Wisdom cries aloud in the street; in the markets she raises her voice; on the top of the walls she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks: 'How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge? Give heed to my reproof; behold, I will pour out my thoughts to you; I will make my words known to you.
Because I have called and you refused to listen, have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded, and you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when panic strikes you, when panic strikes you like a storm, and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you.
Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but will not find me.
Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord, would have none of my counsel, and despised all my reproof, therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way and be sated with their own devices.
For the simple are killed by their turning away, and the complacence of fools destroys them; but he who listens to me will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of evil.

Day 01-Mar-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

The Righteous Martyr Eudocia the Samaritan

Eudocia lived in the Phoenician city of Heliopolis during the reign of Trajan. Initially, Eudocia was a great debauchee, but afterward she was a penitent, an ascetic, and finally a martyr. Through her harlotry she amassed a huge fortune. The change in her life occurred inadvertently, through God's providence and a certain elder, the monk Germanus. Having come into the city on an obedience, Germanus was residing at the home of a Christian whose house was adjacent to that of Eudocia. In the evening, according to monastic practice, he began to recite the Psalter and a book on the Dread Judgment. Eudocia heard him and eavesdropped attentively to the end. Fear and terror overcame her, and she remained awake until dawn. At daybreak she sent her servant to beseech the monk to come to her. Germanus came, and a lengthy conversation took place between them about what the elderly monk had been reading the night before, and about faith and salvation in general. As a result of their conversation, Eudocia petitioned the local bishop to baptize her. Following her baptism, Eudocia bequeathed her entire estate to the Church, to be distributed among the poor. After dismissing her servants and slaves, she withdrew to a convent. Thus, Eudocia resolved to dedicate herself to the monastic life: obedience, patience, vigils, prayer and fasting. After thirteen months Eudocia was elected abbess. She lived in the convent for fifty-six years and was found worthy before God. He endowed her with such grace that she even raised the dead. When the persecution of Christians began under Prince Vincent, St. Eudocia was beheaded. Eudocia is a glorious example of how a vessel of impurity can be purified, sanctified and filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit, the precious fragrance of heaven.

Source: St. Nikolai Velimirovic, The Prologue of Ohrid – Volume One.

Apolytikion

The image of God, was faithfully preserved in you, O Mother. For you took up the Cross and followed Christ. By Your actions you taught us to look beyond the flesh

for it passes, rather to be concerned about the soul which is immortal. Wherefore, O Holy Eudocia, your soul rejoices with the angels.

Kontakion

When thou wast brought up from the mire of transgression, like a most precious stone whose brightness is darkened, repentance made thee shine again with godliness; and when thou hadst reached the height of ascetical striving. Christ made thee illustrious with the glory of contest, and hath bestowed on thee His grace to heal, O wise Eudocia, thou rival of angel-kind.

Venerable Agapius of Vatopedi Monastery
Holy Martyr Antonina
Venerable Domnina of Syria
Albinus, Bishop of Angers

Day 01-Mar-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Isaiah 2:3-11; Genesis 1:24-2:3; Proverbs 2:1-22

Old Testament Readings: Isaiah 2:3-11 Thus say the people: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.
For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.
He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.
O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord.
For thou hast rejected thy people, the house of Jacob, because they are full of diviners from the east and of soothsayers like the Philistines, and they strike hands with foreigners.
Their land is filled with silver and gold, and there is no end to their treasures; their land is filled with horses, and there is no end to their chariots.
Their land is filled with idols; they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their own fingers have made.
So man is humbled, and men are brought low — forgive them not! Enter into the rock, and hide in the dust from before the terror of the Lord, and from the glory of his majesty.
The haughty looks of man shall be brought low, and the pride of men shall be humbled; and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day.
Genesis 1:24-2:3 And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.
And it was so.
And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the cattle according to their kinds, and everything that creeps upon the ground according to its kind.
And God saw that it was good.
Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.
So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

And God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.
And God said, 'Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.
And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.
And it was so.
And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.
And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day.
Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.
And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done.
So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation.
Proverbs 2:1-22 My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; yes, if you cry out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.
For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice and preserving the way of his saints.
Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path; for wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; discretion will watch over you; understanding will guard you; delivering you from the way of evil, from men of perverted speech, who forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness, who rejoice in doing evil and delight in the perverseness of evil; men whose paths are crooked, and who are devious in their ways.
You will be saved from the loose woman, from the adventuress with her smooth words, who forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God; for her house sinks down to death, and her paths to the shades; none who go to her come back nor do they regain the paths of life.
So you will walk in the way of good men and keep to the paths of the righteous.
For the upright will inhabit the land, and men of integrity will remain in it; but the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the treacherous will be rooted out of it.

Day 02-Mar-2023 Thursday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

St Nicholas (Planas), priest in Athens (1932)

St Nicholas was a simple parish priest in Athens, humble, poor, and barely literate. He was born on Naxos in 1851 to moderately prosperous parents; but when his father died, his mother was reduced to near-poverty, and moved the family to Athens. St Nicholas married at the age of seventeen, but his wife died after a short time, leaving him with one son. He served the Divine Liturgy daily, never missing a day for fifty years, despite illness, storms, and war. His liturgies unfailingly lasted for several hours, mostly due to the hundreds of commemorations that he included. The faithful would give him sheets of paper containing names to be commemorated; he would carry all the sheets with him in bulging satchels. A few of his spiritual children made it their task to go through the papers secretly and discard the oldest and most worn, so that the commemorations would not increase without limit.

In his conversation, the Saint had a simple and childlike (his detractors would say childish) manner, and he was widely despised by more sophisticated laymen, priests and hierarchs, never being appointed to any but the smallest and poorest parishes. Many, however, discerned his holiness, and a large synodia of spiritual children slowly gathered around him.

Once, a very young altar boy ran out from the altar while Fr Nicholas was serving and, trembling with fear, cried to his mother, 'Mama, Father Nicholas is floating in the air!' His mother, trying to comfort him, said 'Don't be afraid, all priests do that when they serve the Liturgy.' St. Nicholas was often in difficulties with the hierarchy because he continued to keep the feasts according to the Old Calendar after the Church in Greece had adopted the New Calendar. Nonetheless, he never broke communion with the national church (nor they with him): his humility left no room for Church politics. He was later proclaimed a Saint, both by the official 'New Calendar' Church of Greece and their 'Old Calendar' opposition. Like St John Maximovich, his holiness has transcended the canonical disputes that bedevil the Church. He reposed in peace in 1932.

Hieromartyr Theodotus, bishop of Cyrenia (326)

Known for his wisdom and virtue, he was chosen as Bishop of Cyrenia on the island of Cyprus. When a persecution broke out against the Christians under the Emperor Licinius, Theodotus was arrested and subjected to many tortures. His torturer Sabinus urged him repeatedly to renounce Christ and worship the idols, but Theodotus replied, 'If you knew the goodness of my God, who, it is my hope, will by these brief tortures make me worthy of eternal life, you would wish to suffer for Him as I do.' The pagans then drove nails into his body, for which he thanked God. Believing that his death was approaching, he calmly gave counsel and instruction to the Christians around him. By God's providence, an order came from the new Emperor Constantine to free all Christians who were being held for the sake of Christ. Thus Theodotus was freed and, though greatly weakened by his torments, served his flock faithfully for two more years before reposing in peace.

The Four Hundred and Forty Martyrs of Lombardy (579)

Forty of them were beheaded in one place in Lombardy (in Italy) because they refused to eat food offered to idols. Another four hundred were massacred because they refused to join with the Lombard pagans' practice of dancing around a goat's head that had been brought for sacrifice to the idols. Their deaths are recorded by St Gregory the Dialogist (Gregory the Great).

We sometimes imagine that the Roman Empire converted almost overnight to Christianity during the reign of St Constantine the Great. This incident, more than two hundred years into Europe's 'Christian era', reminds us that the progress of the Faith among the people was often slow and halting, and that paganism remained a force for many centuries.

Holy Martyr Euthalia (257)

She was a pagan maiden living in Sicily with her mother (also named Euthalia) and her brother Sermilianus. When Euthalia's mother became ill with an issue of blood, the holy martyrs Alphius, Philadelphus and Cyrinus (May 10) appeared to her in a dream and told her that she would only be healed if she were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Heeding the dream, she believed, was baptized, and was healed. Her daughter Euthalia, seeing this wonder, was also baptised. Sermilianus, despising and hating the Christian faith, first mocked his mother and sister for their conversion, then threatened them. The mother fled the house in fear. Euthalia remained, saying to her brother 'I am a Christian, and have no fear of death.' The cruel Sermilianus persecuted her more and more harshly until finally, enraged by the futility of

his threats, he beheaded his own sister by his own hand, unknowingly procuring for her a crown of eternal glory. "And thus in this example were fulfilled the words of Christ that He was bringing a sword among men which would divide those of one blood but not those of one faith (Matt. 10:34-35)." (Prologue)

Holy Martyr Hesychius the Palatine

Holy Martyr Troadius

Day 02-Mar-2023 Thursday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Isaiah 2:11-22; Genesis 2:4-19; Proverbs 3:1-18

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 2:11-21 The haughty looks of man shall be brought low, and the pride of men shall be humbled; and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day.
For the Lord of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up and high; against all the cedars of Lebanon, lofty and lifted up; and against all the oaks of Bashan; against all the high mountains, and against all the lofty hills; against every high tower, and against every fortified wall; against all the ships of Tarshish, and against all the beautiful craft.
And the haughtiness of man shall be humbled, and the pride of men shall be brought low; and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day.
And the idols shall utterly pass away.
And men shall enter the caves of the rocks and the holes of the ground, from before the terror of the Lord, and from the glory of his majesty, when he rises to terrify the earth.
In that day men will cast forth their idols of silver and their idols of gold, which they made for themselves to worship, to the moles and to the bats, to enter the caverns of the rocks and the clefts of the cliffs, from before the terror of the Lord, and from the glory of his majesty, when he rises to terrify the earth.

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 2:4-19 These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.
In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up — for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no man to till the ground; but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground — then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.
And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed.
And out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers.

The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one which flows around the whole land of Hav'ilah, where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there.
The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one which flows around the whole land of Cush.
And the name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria.
And the fourth river is the Euphra'tes.
The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.
And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.
Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.
So out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.

Old Testament Reading: Proverbs 3:1-18 My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments; for length of days and years of life and abundant welfare will they give you.
Let not loyalty and faithfulness forsake you; bind them about your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart.
So you will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and man.
Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight.
In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.
Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.
It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.
Honor the Lord with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.
My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.
Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gets understanding, for the gain from it is better than gain from silver and its profit better than gold.
She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her.
Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor.
Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.
She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called happy.

Day 03-Mar-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Martyrs Eutropius, Cleonicus and Basiliscus (308)

They were fellow-soldiers and kinsmen of St Theodore the Tyro (Feb. 17). When St Theodore received his martyrdom, they were kept in prison because the governor of Amasia was unwilling to execute them. But a new and crueler governor, Asclepiodotus, took his place and ordered the three soldiers of Christ to be brought to him. At first, the governor used flattery and bribery to attempt to turn the three from Christ. He invited Eutropius to dine with him, but Eutropius refused, quoting the Psalm 'Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsels of the ungodly.' He then offered them a huge amount of silver, which they likewise refused, telling the governor that Judas lost his soul for silver. The governor then turned to torture, subjecting the three to extreme torments. At last, he condemned Eutropius and Cleonicus to crucifixion, for which they joyfully gave thanks that they had been found worthy to die the same death as Christ. Basiliscus was held in prison awhile longer in hopes that the deaths of his companions would weaken his resolve; but when he remained steadfast in the Faith, he was beheaded, on May 22 (on which he is also commemorated) in 308.

An Unknown Girl in Alexandria (?)

"She was from a wealthy house, having a good father who suffered much and had a difficult death, and an evil mother who had an easy life, died in peace and was buried with honour. In uncertainty whether to live by the example of her father or her mother, this maiden had a vision, in which the state of her father and of her mother were shown to her. She saw her father in the Kingdom of God, and her mother in darkness and torment. This determined her to devote her whole life to God, and, like her father, follow the commandments of God without regard to any opposition or misfortune that she might have to endure. And she followed the commandments of God to the end, with His help, and was made worthy of the Kingdom of heaven, in which she was reunited with her beloved father." (Prologue)

Saint Piamoun the Egyptian

Hieromartyr Theodoretus of Antioch

Day 03-Mar-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Isaiah 3:1-14; Genesis 2:20-3:20; Proverbs 3:19-34

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 3:1-14 For, behold, the Lord, the Lord of hosts, is taking away from Jerusalem and from Judah stay and staff, the whole stay of bread, and the whole stay of water; the mighty man and the soldier, the judge and the prophet, the diviner and the elder, the captain of fifty and the man of rank, the counselor and the skillful magician and the expert in charms.
And I will make boys their princes, and babes shall rule over them.
And the people will oppress one another, every man his fellow and every man his neighbor; the youth will be insolent to the elder, and the base fellow to the honorable.
When a man takes hold of his brother in the house of his father, saying: 'You have a mantle; you shall be our leader, and this heap of ruins shall be under your rule'; in that day he will speak out, saying: 'I will not be a healer; in my house there is neither bread nor mantle; you shall not make me leader of the people.
For Jerusalem has stumbled, and Judah has fallen; because their speech and their deeds are against the Lord, defying his glorious presence.
Their partiality witnesses against them; they proclaim their sin like Sodom, they do not hide it.
Woe to them! For they have brought evil upon themselves.
Tell the righteous that it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their deeds.
Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him, for what his hands have done shall be done to him.
My people — children are their oppressors, and women rule over them.
O my people, your leaders mislead you, and confuse the course of your paths.
The Lord has taken his place to contend, he stands to judge his people.
The Lord enters into judgment with the elders and princes of his people: 'It is you who have devoured the vineyard, the spoil of the poor is in your houses.

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 2:20-3:20 The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper fit for him.
So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

Then the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.
Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.
And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.
Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made.
He said to the woman, 'Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden'?'
And the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.
But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die.
For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.
So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate.
Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons.
And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.
But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?' And he said, 'I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.
He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?' The man said, 'The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.
Then the Lord God said to the woman, 'What is this that you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent beguiled me, and I ate.
The Lord God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, cursed are you above all cattle, and above all wild animals; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.
I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.
To the woman he said, 'I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.
And to Adam he said, 'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.
In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of

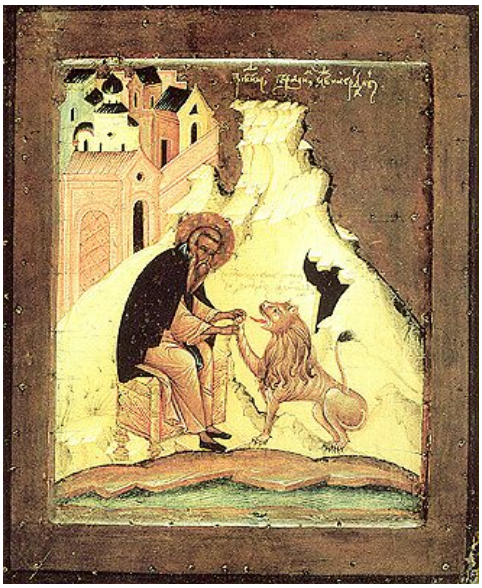
it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.
The man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.

Old Testament Reading: Proverbs 3:19-34 The Lord by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens; by his knowledge the deeps broke forth, and the clouds drop down the dew.
My son, keep sound wisdom and discretion; let them not escape from your sight, and they will be life for your soul and adornment for your neck.
Then you will walk on your way securely and your foot will not stumble.
If you sit down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.
Do not be afraid of sudden panic, or of the ruin of the wicked, when it comes; for the Lord will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being caught.
Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it.
Do not say to your neighbor, 'Go, and come again, tomorrow I will give it' — when you have it with you.
Do not plan evil against your neighbor who dwells trustingly beside you.
Do not contend with a man for no reason, when he has done you no harm.
Do not envy a man of violence and do not choose any of his ways; for the perverse man is an abomination to the Lord, but the upright are in his confidence.
The Lord’s curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the abode of the righteous.
Toward the scorners he is scornful, but to the humble he shows favor.

Day 04-Mar-2023 Saturday

Fast Day ; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

St Gerasimos of the Jordan (475)



He was from Lycia in Asia Minor. After living there as a hermit for many years, he traveled to the Egyptian Thebaid and lived among the Desert Fathers. He then went to Palestine, where he founded the great Lavra, a community of about seventy monks, that remains to this day. The monastery's rule was simple and strict: During the five weekdays, the monks would stay in their cells, praying and weaving baskets and mats. On these days they ate only a little dry bread and some dates. On Saturdays and Sundays the monks gathered for worship and ate boiled vegetables with a little wine. Each monk owned only one garment; if he left his cell he was required to leave it open so that anyone else could take whatever he needed from it. Saint Gerasimos himself was an example to all of them, exceeding even the rule that he laid upon them: during the Great Fast, he would eat nothing but what he received in Holy Communion.

In the desert, the Saint once saw a lion in great pain from a thorn in its paw. Moved by compassion, Gerasim approached it, made the sign of the Cross and pulled the thorn out. The lion followed the elder back to the monastery and remained there until the Saint's death. When Gerasimos died, the lion, overcome by grief, soon died also, lying upon the Saint's grave.

Saint Gerasimos was present at the Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon, where he proved a strong champion of Orthodoxy, though he had inclined toward the Monophysite heresy in his youth. He reposed in peace in 475.

St James the Faster of Phoenecia (6th c.)

"He lived in the sixth century. He was so perfected in godliness that he was able to heal the gravest illnesses by his prayers. But the enemy of the human race brought a heavy temptation on him. There was once sent to him a woman who had been corrupted by some mockers. She pretended to weep before him, but enticed him to sin. Seeing that he would fall into sin, James put his left hand into the fire and held it there until it was completely burned. Seeing this, the woman was filled with fear and horror, repented and reformed

her life.

"But on a second occasion he did not resist and fell with a young girl whom her parents had brought to him to be healed of her madness. He indeed healed her, but then sinned with her and, in order to conceal the sin, killed her and threw her into a river. As always, the path from lust to murder was not very long. James spent ten years after that as a penitent, living in a grave. He learned after that that God had forgiven him, because, when he at one time prayed for rain in a time of great drought from which both men and cattle were suffering, it fell.

"Here is an example, similar to that of David, of how wicked the evil demon is; how, by the permission of God, the greatest spiritual giants can topple, and how again, by sincere repentance, God in His compassion will forgive the greatest sins and does not punish those who punish themselves." (Prologue)

Holy Martyrs Paul and Juliana

Daniel, Prince of Moscow

Day 04-Mar-2023 Saturday

Fast Day ; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.
Readings of the day: Hebrews 1:1-12; Mark 2:23-3:5
Epistle Reading:
Hebrews 1:1-12

1 In the past, God spoke to the fathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways.
2A t the end of these days, he has spoken to us in his Son whom he has appointed heir of all things and through whom he [had] made the ages.
3 His Son is the radiance of his glory, the exact counterpart of his person, upholding all things by the word of his power.c When he had by himself made purification for our sins, he sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high,
4 having become much better than the angels as the Name he has inherited is superior to theirs. 5For to which of the angels did God ever say: You are my Son! Today I have begotten you and again: I will be a Father to him, and he will be a Son to me?
6 Also, when he brings the firstborn into the world, God says: “Let all the angels of God express adoration to him."
7 Of the angels, God says: Who makes his angels spirits, and his servants a flame of fire; 8but of the Son he says: Your throne O God is unto ages of ages!
The scepter of justice is the scepter of your Kingdom.
9 You have loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your companions.
10 And: You, Lord, in the beginning, laid the foundation of the earth. The heavens are the works of your hands. 11 They will perish, but you continue. They all will grow old as a garment,

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descended from David, as preached in my gospel, the gospel for which I am suffering and wearing fetters like a criminal.
But the word of God is not fettered.
Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain salvation in Christ Jesus with its eternal glory.

Gospel Reading: Mark 2:23-28; 3:1-5

At that time, Jesus was going through the grainfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain.
And the Pharisees said to him, 'Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?' And he said to them, 'Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?' And he said to them, 'The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath; so the Son of man is lord even of the sabbath.

Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand.
And they watched him, to see whether he would heal him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him.
And he said to the man who had the withered hand, 'Come here.
And he said to them, 'Is it lawful on the sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?' But they were silent.
And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, 'Stretch it out,' and his hand was restored.

Day 05-Mar-2023 Sunday

Fast Day ; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Martyr Conon of Isauria (2nd c.)

The holy Martyr Conon lived in the days of the holy Apostles; he was born in the village of Bydane of Isauria in Asia Minor, to parents named Nestor and Nada. He was instructed in the Faith and baptised into Christ by the Archangel Michael himself, who, it is said, accompanied him for the rest of his life. His parents joined him in marriage to a pagan maiden named Anna; but on their wedding night he took a candle, put it under a vessel, and asked her 'Which is better, light or darkness?' She answered 'Light,' and he told her of the Christian faith and the joys of the spiritual life. She accepted Christ, and the two agreed to live in virginity. Conon went on to bring many pagans to Christ, including his own parents. His wife and both parents died after a few years (Nestor as a Martyr) and he gave himself up entirely to prayer, fasting, and contemplation on God. He was known as a wonder-worker, and even evil spirits were compelled to serve him.

During one of the persecutions, Magnus the governor of Isauria imprisoned Conon and had him tortured, beaten and stabbed with knives. Believers obtained some of his blood, and the sick who were anointed with it became well. A large crowd of Christians whom Conon had brought to Faith surrounded the governor's palace demanding Conon's release, and the frightened governor let him go. He lived for two more years in his own home, then reposed in peace.

St Mark of Athens (4th c.)

He was born in Athens of pagan parents, but believed and was baptized, and, forsaking everything, lived as a hermit in the desert beyond Egypt. He did not see another human being for ninety-five years, and we would know nothing of his life had not the monk Serapion come upon him. Mark was about to depart this life, and lived only long enough to tell Serapion his story. Serapion then gave him burial.

St Mark the Ascetic (5th c.)

St Mark was a disciple of St John Chrysostom, tonsured a monk at the age of forty by St John himself. He then withdrew to the Nitrian desert and lived for sixty years as a hermit, devoting himself to fasting, prayer, and writing spiritual discourses.

Saint Mark knew all the Holy Scriptures by heart. His compassion was so great that he wept at the distress of any of God's creatures: once he wept for the blind pup of a hyena, and the pup received its sight. Though he lived alone

in the desert, it is said that he received Communion from an angel.

The holy and scholarly Patriarch Photios held his writings in the highest esteem, and at one time there was a saying, 'sell all that you have, and buy Mark.' Some of these beautiful and profound writings may be read in English in the first volume of the Philokalia.

Holy Martyr Conon the Gardener

Martyr Conon the Gardner was born in Nazareth and lived during the reign of Emperor Decius (249-251). When he arrived in Pamphylia, he opted for a small garden where he was plating vegetables, which he gave to the foreign and those in need. He was a very calm person. When he was brought to the ruler of the region to be punished for being Christian, those who arrested him kissed him to deride his faith. However, Conon kissed them back. When they told him that the ruler was calling him, he responded, 'Why? What he wants from a Christian like me?'. The soldiers tied him and brought him to the ruler. He forced him to sacrifice and worship the idols. Then, Conon boldly told the ruler, 'If only you could renounce these idols and declare your faith in Jesus Christ.' The ruler ordered the saint be brutally tortured. He remained steadfast in his faith in Jesus Christ. He received the wreath of martyrdom.

Virgil, Archbishop of Arles

Day 05-Mar-2023 Sunday

Fast Day ; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY
Hebrews 11:24-26, 32-12:2; John 1:43-51
Epistle Reading: St.
Paul's Letter to the Hebrews 11:24-26, 32-40 Brethren, by faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.
And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets — who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign enemies to flight.
Women received their dead by resurrection.
Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, that they might rise again to a better life.
Others suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment.
They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated — of whom the world was not worthy — wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.
And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

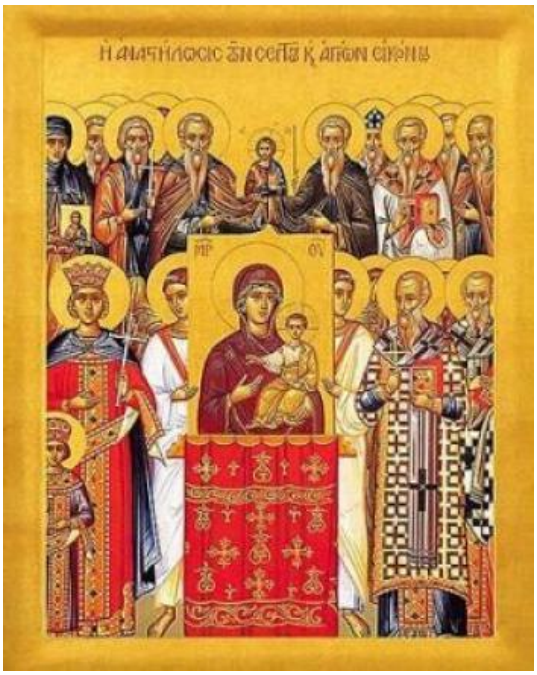
Gospel Reading: The Sunday Of Orthodoxy

At that time, Jesus decided to go to Galilee.
And he found Philip and said to him, 'Follow me.
Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.
Philip found Nathanael, and he said to him, 'We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.
Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see.
Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and said of him, 'Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!' Nathanael said to him, 'How do you know me?' Jesus

answered him, 'Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.
Nathanael answered him, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' Jesus answered him, 'Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these.
And he said to him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.

APOLYTIKION OF THE FEAST 2nd Mode He honour your most pure icon, loving Lord, as we ask pardon of our offences, Christ God. For by your own choice you were well-pleased to ascend the Cross in the flesh, to deliver from the slavery of the enemy those whom you had fashioned; therefore with thanksgiving we cry to you: You have filled all things with joy, our Saviour, by coming to save the world.

EXTRACT FROM THE SYNODIKON FOR THE SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY



As the Prophets saw, as the Apostles taught, as the Church has received, as the Teachers express in dogma, as the inhabited world understands together with them, as grace illumines, as the truth makes clear, as error has been banished, as wisdom makes bold to declare,
as Christ has assured, so we think, so we speak, so we preach, honouring Christ our true God, and his Saints, in words, in writings, in thoughts, in sacrifices, in churches, in icons, worshipping and revering the One as God and Lord, and honouring them because of their common Lord as those who are close to him and serve him, and making to them relative veneration.
This is the faith of the Apostles; this is the faith of the Fathers; this is the faith of the Orthodox; this faith makes fast the inhabited world.
These preachers of true religion, we praise as brothers and as those we long to have as our fathers, to the glory and honour of the true religion for which they struggled, and say... May their memory be eternal!

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING
‘Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus’. ur Lord Jesus Christ is the archetypal Man. We were all created is His image and in Him we see what man was intended and preordained to be. In other words, we see man’s true potential

accomplished in Christ Jesus.
He is the example par excellence of what man can become in collaboration with God. Therefore, if we do not recognise Christ as He truly is, we also deny our true selves. As the above quote states, our task in the Church is to acquire the mind of Christ. The Church tries to make us Christ-like in the way we live, in the way we interact with the world, and in the way we think.
It is enough to take a humble, honest look into ourselves to see that our minds are corrupt and ailing. Moreover, it is enough to take a look at the tragic world around us, with all its evil and wickedness, to realise that something is drastically wrong with the way people think and act.
The Church has a simple word to explain this depravity: sin. When God created man,
He had a much more exalted way of life in mind for Him. But as the Bible tells us, and our own lives bear witness to, sin intervened. Man distanced himself from God and His holy will, and the tragedy and corruption of the world ensued.
In order to call man back to what God had intended him to be, God sent His beloved Son into the world to show us how far we had estranged ourselves from Him, and to give us a concrete, living example of what it means to be man.
According to the theology of our Church, man is a mystery.
As Patriarch Bartholomew says, ‘each human person is uniquely created in the image of God, never able to be reduced to anything less than a mystery.’
But living in this broken world, it is all too easy to lose sight of our high calling. When sin overtakes us, our life resembles more the life of brute beasts than the life of mysterious beings made to be God-like. It is all too clear that something needs to change.
This is why Christ and His Church call us to repentance, which means a renewal of mind and of the way we live. The way the Church thinks is the way we need to learn to think about God, about ourselves, and about the world. If we fail to realise that the way we think has tremendous impact on how we live then we have already missed the mark.
The Church has given us various means to help us correct our minds and to learn the mind of Christ.
And one of the most powerful means we have at our disposal is the Divine Liturgy. The Liturgy is the heart of the Orthodox Christian life, and it also reveals the mind of God.
It is through the Liturgy that we work out our salvation and we gradually correct the way we think and act towards God, towards our neighbour, and towards the world. It is through regular participation in the Church services, and more especially the Divine Liturgy, that we begin to acquire the mind of Christ.
That is why it is so important to be present at the services, not just with our bodies, but with our hearts, and with our minds.
This is how we will gradually learn to shake off the mind of this fallen sinful world and acquire the mind of Christ.

Day 06-Mar-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

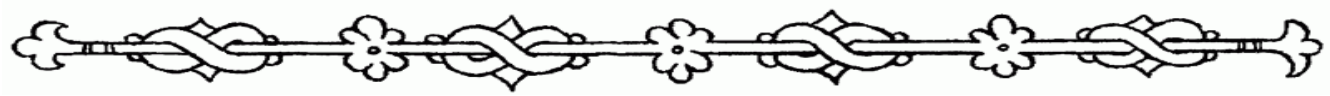
The 42 Martyrs of Ammorion (845)

They were taken captive when Amorion in Phrygia fell to the Muslims in 838, during the reign of Emperor Theophilus. Many of them were officers, and because of their status and reputation, their captors, rather than kill them, attempted to convert them to Islam. The forty-two were kept in a miserable dungeon in Syria, where they were alternately promised the highest honors and privileges if they would convert and threatened with the most horrible consequences if they refused. This continued for seven full years, but none would deny his faith in Christ. Finally, unable to shake their faith, their captors beheaded them all in 845.

Venerable Hesychius the Wonderworker

Venerable Job of Anzersk

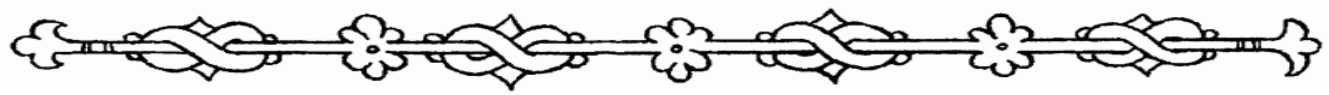
Finding of the Precious Cross by Saint Helen



Day 06-Mar-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Isaiah 4:2-6, 5:1-7; Genesis 3:21-4:7; Proverbs 3:34-4:22
Matins
Gospel Reading: Luke 21:12-19 The Lord said to his disciples, 'Beware of men who will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name’s sake.
This will be a time for you to bear testimony.
Settle it therefore in your minds, not to meditate beforehand how to answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.
You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and kinsmen and friends, and some of you they will put to death; you will be hated by all for my name’s sake.
But not a hair of your head will perish.
By your endurance you will gain your lives.
Epistle Reading: St.
Paul’s Letter to the Hebrews 12:1-10 BRETHREN, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.
Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.
In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.
And have you forgotten the exhortation which addresses you as sons? 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor lose courage when you are punished by him.
For the Lord disciplines him whom he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.
It is for discipline that you have to endure.
God is treating you as sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.
Besides this, we have had earthly fathers to discipline us and we respected them.
Shall we not much more be subject to the Father.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 20:1-16
The Lord said this parable, 'The kingdom of heaven is like a householder who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.
After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard.
And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.
’ So they went.
Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same.
And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing; and he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.
’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.
’ And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.
’ And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius.
Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius.
And on receiving it they grumbled at the householder, saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.
’ But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you, and go; I choose to give to this last as I give to you.
Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or is your eye evil because I am good?’ So the last will be first, and the first last.
For many are called, but few are chosen.



Day 07-Mar-2023 Tuesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Hieromartyrs of Cherson: Basileus, Ephraim, Eugenios, Capito, Aetherios, Agathodoros, and Elpidios (4th c.)

These seven holy Bishops give a vivid picture of the dangers endured by those who traveled to proclaim the Gospel of Christ in the early centuries of the Church. All seven were sent as missionary bishops to Cherson on the Black Sea, and all seven died there as Martyrs. Hermon, Bishop of Jerusalem, first sent Ephraim and Basileus; Basileus raised the son of the prince of Cherson to life, after which many believed and were baptized. The unbelievers, though, bound him by the feet and dragged him through the streets until he died. Ephraim was beheaded when he refused to make sacrifice to the idols. Eugenios, Agathodoros, and Elpidios were then sent by the Bishop of Jerusalem; they were beaten to death with rods and stones. Aetherius was sent during the reign of Constantine the Great, and was able to govern the Church in freedom and peace, and to build a church in Cherson. Capito, the last to be sent, brought the Gospel to the fierce Scythians. To prove the power of his God, they asked him to go into a burning furnace, saying that if he was not consumed, they would believe. Putting all his trust in God, the holy Bishop vested himself, made the sign of the Cross, and entered the furnace. He stood in the flames, fervently praying, for an hour, and came out untouched. The spectators cried out 'There is one God, the great and powerful God of the Christians, who keeps His servant safe in the burning furnace!', and all those in the town and the surrounding countryside were baptized. This miracle was spoken of at the Council of Nicea (325). Later, Scythian unbelievers captured Capito and drowned him in the River Dnieper.

The Prologue says that Aetherios ended his life in peace; the Great Horologion, that he was drowned. All these holy missionaries labored around the beginning of the fourth century.

Our Venerable Father Paul the Simple

Venerable Laurence of Salamis

Day 07-Mar-2023 Tuesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Isaiah 5:7-16; Genesis 4:8-15; Proverbs 5:1-15

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 5:7-16 Thus says the Lord: For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, a cry! Woe to those who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is no more room, and you are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land.
The LORD of hosts has sworn in my hearing: 'Surely many houses shall be desolate, large and beautiful houses, without inhabitant.
For ten acres of vineyard shall yield but one bath, and a homer of seed shall yield but an ephah.
Woe to those who rise early in the morning, that they may run after strong drink, who tarry late into the evening till wine inflames them! They have lyre and harp, timbrel and flute and wine at their feasts; but they do not regard the deeds of the LORD, or see the work of his hands.
Therefore my people go into exile for want of knowledge; their honored men are dying of hunger, and their multitude is parched with thirst.
Therefore Sheol has enlarged its appetite and opened its mouth beyond measure, and the nobility of Jerusalem and her multitude go down, her throng and he who exults in her.
Man is bowed down, and men are brought low, and the eyes of the haughty are humbled.
But the LORD of hosts is exalted in justice, and the Holy God shows himself holy in righteousness.

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 4:8-15 Cain said to Abel his brother, 'Let us go out to the field.
And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him.
Then the LORD said to Cain, 'Where is Abel your brother?' He said, 'I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?' And the LORD said, 'What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground.

And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand.
When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength; you shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.
Cain said to the LORD, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear.
Behold, thou hast driven me this day away from the ground; and from thy face I shall be hidden; and I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will slay me.
Then the LORD said to him, 'Not so! If any one slays Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.
And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who came upon him should kill him.

Old Testament Reading: Proverbs 5:1-15 My son, be attentive to my wisdom, incline your ear to my understanding; that you may keep discretion, and your lips may guard knowledge.
For the lips of a loose woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword.
Her feet go down to death; her steps follow the path to Sheol; she does not take heed to the path of life; her ways wander, and she does not know it.
And now, O sons, listen to me, and do not depart from the words of my mouth.
Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house; lest you give your honor to others and your years to the merciless; lest strangers take their fill of your strength, and your labors go to the house of an alien; and at the end of your life you groan, when your flesh and body are consumed, and you say, 'How I hated discipline, and my heart despised reproof! I did not listen to the voice of my teachers or incline my ear to my instructors.
I was at the point of utter ruin in the assembled congregation.
Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well.

Day 08-Mar-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

St Theophylactus, bishop of Nicomedia (845)

"Theophylact was from the east; his native city is unknown. In Constantinople he became a close friend of Tarasius, who afterwards became Patriarch of Constantinople (see Feb. 25). Theophylact was made Bishop of Nicomedia. After the death of Saint Tarasius, his successor Nicephorus (see June 2) called together a number of Bishops to help him in fighting the iconoclasm of Emperor Leo the Armenian, who reigned from 813 to 820. Among them was Euthymius, Bishop of Sardis (celebrated Dec. 26), who had attended the holy Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787 — he was exiled three times for the sake of the holy icons, and for defying the Emperor Theophilus' command to renounce the veneration of the icons, was scourged from head to foot until his whole body was one great wound, from which he died eight days later, about the year 830; Joseph of Thessalonica (see July 14); Michael of Synnada (see May 23); Emilian, Bishop of Cyzicus (see Aug. 8); and Saint Theophylact, who boldly rebuked Leo to his face, telling him that because he despised the long-suffering of God, utter destruction was about to overtake him, and there would be none to deliver him. For this, Theophylact was exiled to the fortress of Strobilus in Karia of Asia Minor, where after 30 years of imprisonment and hardship, he gave up his holy soul about the year 845. Leo the Armenian, according to the Saint's prophecy, was slain in church on the eve of our Lord's Nativity, in 820." (Great Horologion)

Hieromartyr Theodoretus (362)

The priest Theodoretus was custodian of a great cathedral in Antioch, built by the Emperor Constantine and known in its time as 'the golden church' for the beauty and luxury of its appointments. When Julian the Apostate came to the throne, he denied Christ and launched a persecution of Christians. The Emperor's uncle, also named Julian, came to Antioch to prosecute the persecution there. After plundering the church he brought Theodoretus to trial and demanded that he deny Christ. Instead, the faithful priest confessed Christ fervently and rebuked the Emperor for having denied the faith and returned to idol-worship 'as a dog returns to its vomit.' In spite, the judge urinated in the golden church, for which Theodoretus prophesied that he would die a terrible death. Theodoretus was beheaded, and Julian his judge was seized with terrible abdominal pain from the moment he defiled the church until he died in torment.

Note: Theodoretus is commemorated on March 3 in the Greek Calendar.

Paul the Confessor, Bishop of Plousias
Hermas Apostle of the Seventy
Felix, Bishop of Dunwich

Day 08-Mar-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Isaiah 5:16-26; Genesis 4:16-26; Proverbs 5:15-6:3

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 5:16-25 But the LORD of hosts is exalted in justice, and the Holy God shows himself holy in righteousness.
Then shall the lambs graze as in their pasture, fatlings and kids shall feed among the ruins.
Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of falsehood, who draw sin as with cart ropes, who say: 'Let him make haste, let him speed his work that we may see it; let the purpose of the Holy One of Israel draw near, and let it come, that we may know it!' Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight! Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine, and valiant men in mixing strong drink, who acquit the guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of his right! Therefore, as the tongue of fire devours the stubble, and as dry grass sinks down in the flame, so their root will be as rottenness, and their blossom go up like dust; for they have rejected the law of the LORD of hosts, and have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.
Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against his people, and he stretched out his hand against them and smote them, and the mountains quaked; and their corpses were as refuse in the midst of the streets.
For all this his anger is not turned away and his hand is stretched out still.

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 4:16-26 Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden.
Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch.
To Enoch was born Irad; and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael the father of Methushael, and Methushael the father of Lamech.
And Lamech took two wives; the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah.
Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have cattle.
His brother’s name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe.
Zillah bore Tubalcain; he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron.
The sister of Tubalcain was Naamah.
Lamech said to his wives: 'Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; you wives of Lamech,

hearken to what I say: I have slain a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me.
If Cain is avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold.
And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, 'God has appointed for me another child instead of Abel, for Cain slew him.
To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh.
At that time men began to call upon the name of the LORD.

Old Testament Reading: Proverbs 5:15-6:3 Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well.
Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you.
Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely hind, a graceful doe.
Let her affection fill you at all times with delight, be infatuated always with her love.
Why should you be infatuated, my son, with a loose woman and embrace the bosom of an adventuress? For a man’s ways are before the eyes of the LORD, and he watches all his paths.
The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is caught in the toils of his sin.
He dies for lack of discipline, and because of his great folly he is lost.
My son, if you have become surety for your neighbor, have given your pledge for a stranger; if you are snared in the utterance of your lips, caught in the words of your mouth; then do this, my son, and save yourself, for you have come into your neighbor’s power: go, hasten, and importune your neighbor.

Day 09-Mar-2023 Thursday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

The Holy Forty Martyrs of Sebastia (Sebaste) (320)

They were all soldiers under one general, taken captive in the time of Licinius for their faith in Christ. They were stripped naked and cast onto a frozen lake at Sebastia in Pontus. They endured the entire night, encouraging each other to be patient. Some accounts say that their persecutors placed warm baths in their sight on the shore to entice them to renounce Christ. Finally one of their number, broken by his sufferings, apostatized and left the company. One of the guards, named Aglaius, saw in a vision thirty-nine wreaths descending from heaven onto the heads of the faithful sufferers, and was moved to declare himself a Christian. He was immediately sent to join the martyrs on the frozen lake, keeping the number of forty complete. In the morning all of them, almost dead, were cast into fire, and their remains thrown in the lake. On the third day the martyrs appeared to Peter, the local bishop, and told him to search for them in the lake. The bishop went to the lake on a dark night with his clergy, and one account says that the bones of the martyrs rose to the surface and burned there like a candle. The relics were gathered and given honorable burial.

This is the most common account. The Prologue gives a somewhat different version, in which the martyrs were made to stand, not on the frozen lake, but in the freezing waters.

Dismissal Hymn. First Tone
We plead to You for the sake of the sufferings of Your Saints which endured for You, 0 Lord, and heal all our pains, we pray, 0 Friend of man.

Kontakion. Plagal of Second Tone
Having left every military array of the world, you cleaved to the Master Who is in the Heavens, 0 Forty Prize-winners of the Lord; for having passed through fire and water, 0 blessed ones, you rightly received glory from Heaven and a

multitude of crowns.

St Caesarius of Nazianzus(369)

He was the brother of St Gregory the Theologian and, like his brother, was a theological writer. In his works he gave an answer to the question: How long did Adam and Eve spend in Paradise before the Fall? Various writers had given estimates ranging from six hours to three days. Saint Caesarius wrote that our first parents' time in Paradise was forty days; and that for this reason Christ fasted for forty days in the wilderness, being tempted by the Devil. "For, while the old Adam was not able to withstand the devil's temptation in the abundance of Paradise, the New Adam withstood him as a true knight in hunger and thirst in the wilderness." (Prologue)

Day 09-Mar-2023 Thursday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Isaiah 6:1-12; Genesis 5:1-24; Proverbs 6:3-20

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 6:1-12
In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple.
Above him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.
And one called to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.
And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.
And I said: 'Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!' Then flew one of the seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal which he had taken with tongs from the altar.
And he touched my mouth, and said: 'Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven.
And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here am I! Send me.
And he said, 'Go, and say to this people: ‘Hear and hear, but do not understand; see and see, but do not perceive.
’ Make the heart of this people fat, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.
Then I said, 'How long, O Lord?' And he said: 'Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without men, and the land is utterly desolate, and the LORD removes men far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 5:1-24
This is the book of the generations of Adam.
When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God.
Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created.
When Adam had lived a hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a

son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth.
The days of Adam after he became the father of Seth were eight hundred years; and he had other sons and daughters.
Thus all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years; and he died.
When Seth had lived a hundred and five years, he became the father of Enosh.
Seth lived after the birth of Enosh eight hundred and seven years, and had other sons and daughters.
Thus all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years; and he died.
When Enosh had lived ninety years, he became the father of Kenan.
Enosh lived after the birth of Kenan eight hundred and fifteen years, and had other sons and daughters.
Thus all the days of Enosh were nine hundred and five years; and he died.
When Kenan had lived seventy years, he became the father of Mahalalel.
Kenan lived after the birth of Mahalalel eight hundred and forty years, and had other sons and daughters.
Thus all the days of Kenan were nine hundred and ten years; and he died.
When Mahalalel had lived sixty-five years, he became the father of Jared.
Mahalalel lived after the birth of Jared eight hundred and thirty years, and had other sons and daughters.
Thus all the days of Mahalalel were eight hundred and ninety-five years; and he died.
When Jared had lived a hundred and sixty-two years he became the father of Enoch.
Jared lived after the birth of Enoch eight hundred years, and had other sons and daughters.
Thus all the days of Jared were nine hundred and sixty-two years; and he died.
When Enoch had lived sixty-five years, he became the father of Methuselah.
Enoch walked with God after the birth of Methuselah three hundred years, and had other sons and daughters.
Thus all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years.
Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.

Old Testament Reading: Proverbs 6:3-20 Then do this, my son, and save yourself, for you have come into your neighbor’s power: go, hasten, and importune your neighbor.
Give your eyes no sleep and your eyelids no slumber; save yourself like a gazelle from the hunter, like a bird from the hand of the fowler.
Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise.
Without having any chief, officer or ruler, she prepares her food in summer, and gathers her sustenance in harvest.

How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep?
A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a vagabond, and want like an armed man.
A worthless person, a wicked man, goes about with crooked speech, winks with his eyes, scrapes with his feet, points with his finger, with perverted heart devises evil, continually sowing discord; therefore calamity will come upon him suddenly; in a moment he will be broken beyond healing.
There are six things which the LORD hates, seven which are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and a man who sows discord among brothers.
My son, keep your father’s commandment, and forsake not your mother’s teaching.

Day 10-Mar-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Martyrs Codratus (Quadratus) and those with him (258)

'In a time of persecution of Christians, many of the faithful fled to the mountains and caves. The mother of this Codratus did so. She was pregnant at that time, and gave birth to Codratus in a forest, dying almost at once. He was kept safe and fed by the providence of God and his guardian angel. Codratus grew up in solitude with nature. He who gave manna from heaven to the Israelites in the wilderness released a sweet dew from a cloud onto the mouth of the child Codratus. When he was twelve years old, he went down to the town, and there some good people took a fancy to him and educated him. He studied medicine and then began to heal the sick, using both natural medicines and, more importantly, the spiritual power and prayer which had been with him from childhood. When a new persecution arose under Decius, Codratus was taken for trial and thrown into prison. Five of his friends stood beside him and confessed the name of Christ. They were: Cyprian, Dionysius, Anectus, Paul and Crescens. They were all dragged through the streets and struck with sticks and stones by the unbelievers, especially by the children, until they arrived at the scaffold. Here the martyrs prayed to God and were beheaded with the sword. A spring of water gushed out onto the earth at the spot, which to this day is called by Codratus' name and commemorates the heroic death for Christ of the holy six. They suffered with honour for the truth in Corinth in the year 250, in the time of the Emperor Decius and his governor Jason.' (Prologue)

Our Holy Mother Anastasia (563)

She was a noble lady at the Imperial court under the Emperor Justinian and his wife Theodora. But when she was widowed she left Constantinople and all her privileges behind and fled to the Egyptian desert. There Abba Daniel tonsured her and, at her request, presented her to the brethren as the eunuch Anastasius, so that she might avoid discovery by imperial investigators. She closed herself in a small cell, where she spent twenty-eight years in prayer and askesis. Shortly before her death, her elder Daniel saw her face shining like the sun.

Venerable Attalus of Bobbio

Η ΑΓΙΑ
ΑΝΑΣΤΑΣΙΑ
Η ΠΑΤΡΙΚΙΑ

Day 10-Mar-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Isaiah 7:1-14; Genesis 5:32-6:8; Proverbs 6:20-7:1

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 7:1-14
In the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, son of Uzziah, king of Judah, Rezin the king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah the king of Israel came up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but they could not conquer it.
When the house of David was told, 'Syria is in league with Ephraim,' his heart and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind.
And the LORD said to Isaiah, 'Go forth to meet Ahaz, you and Shearjashub your son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Fuller’s Field, and say to him, ‘Take heed, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands, at the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria and the son of Remaliah.
Because Syria, with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has devised evil against you, saying, 'Let us go up against Judah and terrify it, and let us conquer it for ourselves, and set up the son of Tabeel as king in the midst of it,' thus says the Lord GOD: It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass.
For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin.
(Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be broken to pieces so that it will no longer be a people.
) And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah.
If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established.
' Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, 'Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.
But Ahaz said, 'I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.
And he said, 'Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign.
Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 5:32-6:8
After Noah was five hundred years old, Noah became the father of Shem, Ham, and Japheth.
When men began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were fair; and they took to wife such of them as they chose.

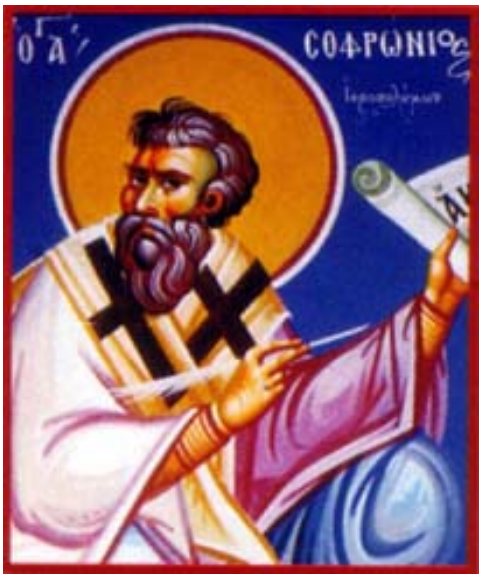
Then the LORD said, 'My spirit shall not abide in man for ever, for he is flesh, but his days shall be a hundred and twenty years.
The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them.
These were the mighty men that were of old, the men of renown.
The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.
And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.
So the LORD said, 'I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground, man and beast and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.
But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

Old Testament Reading: Proverbs 6:20-7:1 My son, keep your father’s commandment, and forsake not your mother’s teaching.
Bind them upon your heart always; tie them about your neck.
When you walk, they will lead you; when you lie down, they will watch over you; and when you awake, they will talk with you.
For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life, to preserve you from the evil woman, from the smooth tongue of the adventuress.
Do not desire her beauty in your heart, and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes; for a harlot may be hired for a loaf of bread, but an adulteress stalks a man’s very life.
Can a man carry fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned? Or can one walk upon hot coals and his feet not be scorched? So is he who goes in to his neighbor’s wife; none who touches her will go unpunished.
Do not men despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his appetite when he is hungry?
And if he is caught, he will pay sevenfold; he will give all the goods of his house.
He who commits adultery has no sense; he who does it destroys himself.
Wounds and dishonor will he get, and his disgrace will not be wiped away.
For jealousy makes a man furious, and he will not spare when he takes revenge.
He will accept no compensation, nor be appeased though you multiply gifts.
My son, keep my words and treasure up my commandments with you.

Day 11-Mar-2023 Saturday

Fast Day ; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

St Sophronios, patriarch of Jerusalem (638)



He was born in Damascus to an eminent family, and was well educated in his youth. Discontented with the wisdom of the world, he entered monastic life in the monastery of St Theodosius, where he became the lifelong friend and disciple of John Moschos. Together they visited the monasteries and hermitages of Egypt; they later wrote down their discoveries among the holy monks in the classic Spiritual Meadow. After the death of his teacher, St Sophronius traveled to Jerusalem, which had just been liberated from the Persians. He was there to see the Precious Cross returned from Persia by the Emperor Heraclius, who carried it into Jerusalem on his back. A few years later, in 634, St Sophronius was elected Patriarch of Jerusalem, where he served his flock wisely for three years and three months. He was zealous in the defense of Orthodoxy against the Monothelite heresy: He convoked a Council in Jerusalem which condemned it before it was condemned at the Sixth Ecumenical Council. The holy Patriarch even traveled to Constantinople to rebuke the Patriarch Sergius and Emperor Heraclius, who had embraced the Monothelite error.

The years of peace were few for the Holy Land; for just as the Persian Empire was decisively defeated by Heraclius, the followers of Islam erupted out of Arabia, conquering most of North Africa and the Middle East in a few years. The Saint was so grieved by the capture of Jerusalem in 637 by the Caliph Omar that begged God to take him, so that he might not live to see the desecration of the holy places. His prayer was granted, and he reposed in peace less than a year later.

St Sophronios is the author of the Life of Saint Mary of Egypt, appointed to be read in the churches during every Great Lent. He also wrote the service of the Great Blessing of the Waters. Some have attributed the Vesperal hymn "Gladsome Light" to him, but we know that it dates from before the time of St Basil the Great, who mentions it in his writings. It seems though, that St Sophronios supplemented the hymn, and that its present form is due to him.

Apolytikion

A model of faith and the image of gentleness, the example of your life has shown you forth to your sheep-fold to be a master of temperance. You obtained thus through being lowly, gifts from on high, and riches through poverty. Sophronius, our father and priest of priests, intercede with Christ our God that He may save our souls.

St John Moschos, author of the Spiritual Meadow (622)

He is commemorated today along with his disciple and friend St Sophronius (see above).

Holy Martyr Pionius (250)

"A priest of Smyrna, he suffered there in the time of Decius' persecution. They condemned him to be crucified, which was a great joy to him. And as soon as the soldiers assembled the cross and laid it on the ground, Pionius laid himself on it and stretched out his arms, calling to the soldiers to put the nails into his hands. The cross was inserted into the ground upside down, and a fire lit under the martyr's head. There were many bystanders. Pionius closed his eyes and prayed to God within himself. The flames could not succeed in igniting even his hair, and when the fire had at last gone out and everyone thought that he was dead, Pionius opened his eyes and cried out joyfully: 'O Lord, receive my spirit!', and breathed his last. This saint wrote the life of St Polycarp of Smyrna, together with whom he now makes merry in the Kingdom of Christ. He suffered and was glorified in 250." (Prologue)

Venerable George the Sinaite

Theodora, Queen of Epirus

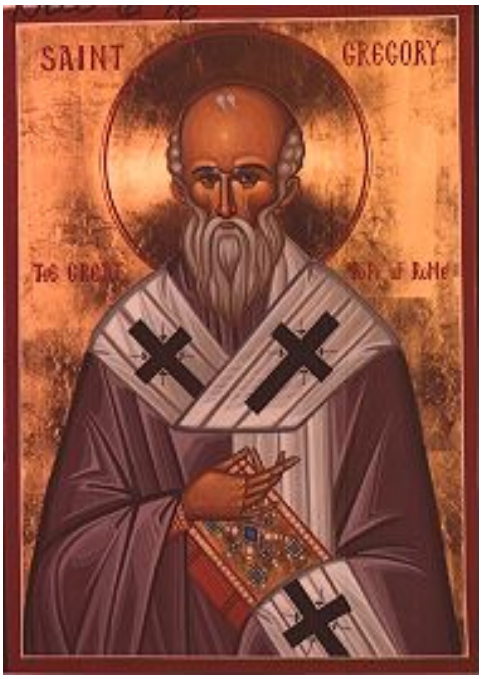
Day 11-Mar-2023 Saturday

Fast Day ; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.
Readings of the day: Hebrews 3:12-16; Mark 1:35-44
Epistle Reading: St.
Paul’s Letter to the Hebrews 3:12-16 BRETHREN, take care lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.
But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.
For we share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end, while it is said, 'Today, when you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.
Who were they that heard and yet were rebellious? Was it not all those who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses?
Gospel Reading: Mark 1:35-44 At that time, Jesus went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed.
And Simon and those who were with him pursued him, and they found him and said to him, 'Everyone is searching for you.
And he said to them, 'Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also; for that is why I came out.
And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.
And a leper came to him beseeching him, and kneeling said to him, 'If you will, you can make me clean.
Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, 'I will; be clean.
And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.
And he sternly charged him, and sent him away at once, and said to him, 'See that you say nothing to any one; but go, show yourself to a priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them.

Day 12-Mar-2023 Sunday

Fast Day ; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

St Gregory the Great (the Dialogist), Pope of Rome (604)



He was born in Rome to a wealthy senatorial family. He received a good education in secular and spiritual learning, and became Prefect of Rome. While still in the world, he used his great wealth mostly for the good of the Church, building six monasteries in Sicily and another in Rome itself. At this monastery, dedicated to the Apostle Andrew, Gregory was tonsured a monk. He was appointed Archdeacon of Rome, then, in 579, Papal legate to Constantinople, where he lived for nearly seven years. He returned to Rome in 585 and was elected Pope in 590.

He is famed for his many writings, his generous charity (he gave almost all his income to the poor, and often invited the poor to share his table), and for initiating missionary work among the Anglo-Saxon peoples. The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, celebrated on Wednesday and Friday evenings during Great Lent, was compiled by him. St Gregory introduced elements of the chanting that he had heard in Constantinople into Western Church chant: The Gregorian Chant which beautified the Western churches for many years is named for him. Its system of modes is related to the eight tones of the Eastern church. He is called 'the Dialogist' after his book The Dialogues, an account of the lives and miracles of Italian saints.

Saint Gregory reposed in peace in 604.

Our Holy Father Theophanes the Confessor (818)

He was born in 760 to an illustrious and very wealthy family — he was a kinsman of the Emperor Leo the Isaurian. In early life he lived in great luxury, married, and became a member of the Emperor's court. Later, with his wife's consent, he abandoned his home, his fortune and his rank to live humbly in a monastery. (His wife also entered monastic life; both of them entered monasteries that they had established with their wealth). Theophanes, though accustomed to a life of splendor and ease, joyfully lived as the lowest of monks for many years. He became so well-known for his faith, purity and wisdom that he was invited to the Seventh Ecumenical Council at Nicaea in

787. He prayed unceasingly for the sick and distressed, and was granted the gift of wonder working: his prayers healed all kinds of illnesses, but especially mania and madness. When he himself fell seriously ill for a long period, he refused to pray for his own healing, but accepted his infirmity with thanksgiving.

When a second iconoclast period arose under the Emperor Leo the Armenian, Theophanes, who was widely known for his defense of the holy icons, was taken to Constantinople and imprisoned under extremely harsh conditions for two years. The Emperor then sent him into exile on the island of Samothrace. There, his body broken by his cruel imprisonment, he lived for only twenty-three days before giving up his soul to God.

Apolytikion

The image of God, was faithfully preserved in you, O Father. For you took up the Cross and followed Christ. By Your actions you taught us to look beyond the flesh for it passes, rather to be concerned about the soul which is immortal. Wherefore, O Holy Theophanes, your soul rejoices with the angels.

Repose of St Symeon the New Theologian (1021)

His main commemoration is on October 12.

Paul, Bishop of Leon

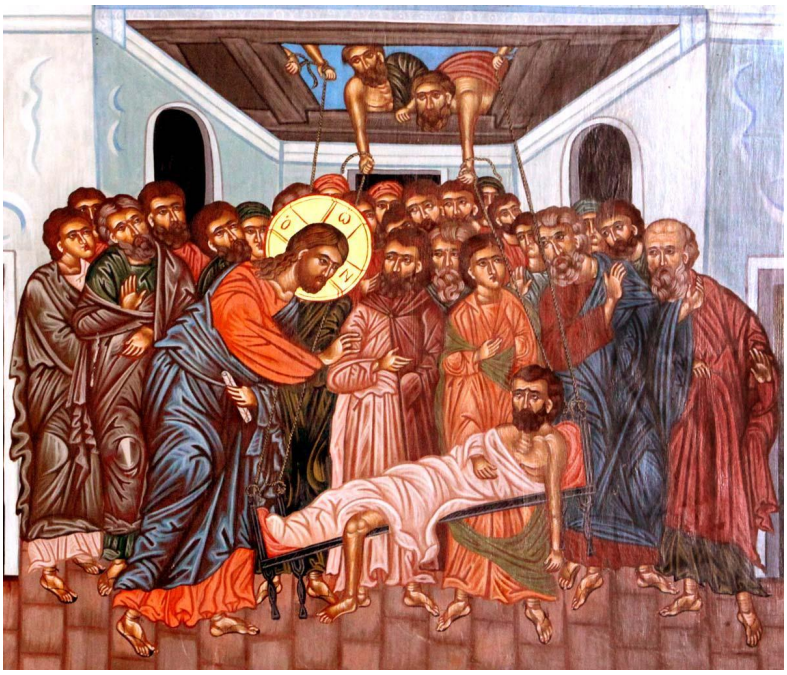
Day 12-Mar-2023 Sunday

Fast Day ; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Sunday of St. Gregory Palamas
Hebrews 1:10-2:3; Mark 2:1-12
Epistle Reading: St.
Paul's Letter to the Hebrews 1:10-14; 2:1-3 'IN THE BEGINNING, Thou, Lord, didst found the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of thy hands; they will perish, but thou remainest; they will all grow old like a garment, like a mantle thou wilt roll them up, and they will be changed.
But thou art the same, and thy years will never end.
But to what angel has he ever said, 'Sit at my right hand, till I make thy enemies a stool for thy feet?' Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation? Therefore we must pay closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.
For if the message declared by angels was valid and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him.

Gospel Reading: The Second Sunday of the Great Lent (Sunday of St. Gregory Palamas): The Sunday of the Paralytic:

At that time, Jesus entered Capernaum and it was reported that he was at home.
And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room for them, not even about the door; and he was preaching the word to them.
And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men.
And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and when they had made an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic lay.
And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'My son, your sins are forgiven.
Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, 'Why does this man speak thus? It is a blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?'
And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, 'Why do you question thus in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your pallet and walk? But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth



to forgive sins'-he said to the paralytic-'I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home. And he rose, and immediately took up the pallet and went out before them all; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, 'We never saw anything like this!'

SERMON ON THE SECOND SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT

We come today to the Second Sunday of Great Lent. While many meet the first week of Lent with enthusiasm and resolve, despite (or, perhaps, because of) its more rigorous demands, this enthusiasm often begins to fade during week two, leaving us discouraged and despondent.

In order to encourage us to continue with our ascetical struggle, in order to answer the question, ‘What’s the point?’, the Church devotes this Sunday to the memory of St Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessaloniki (+1359), best known for his defence of the Orthodox Hesychast tradition of prayer which had come under attack in his day.

This Sunday marks a second Triumph of Orthodoxy in that it celebrates the victory of St Gregory and Hesychasm over Barlaam of Calabria and his followers, who taught that God, being utterly transcendent, cannot be known directly, but only indirectly through creation and the use of limited human reason.

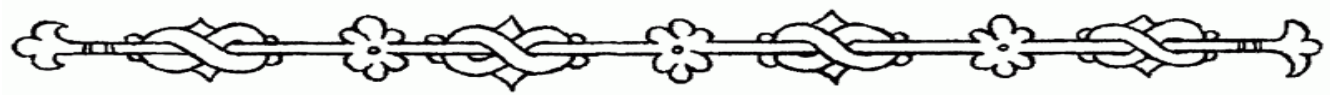
St Gregory, however, argued that, although God is ultimately unknowable in his ‘essence’, we can perceive and partake of his divine ‘energies’, which are not created intermediaries, but the uncreated presence of God himself.

Although the theological niceties of ‘Palamism’ can often seem difficult and confusing, St Gregory’s core message was a very simple one: We can know God; not only second-hand, not only by means of reason or through creation, but we can know him directly, really and truly. Moreover, this encounter with God is not simply something we hope for in the afterlife, but something that can and should begin in the here and now.

The disciples of our Lord had seen the uncreated Light of his glory when he was transfigured before them on Mount Tabor, and the lived experience of the hesychasts proved that this same vision and experience of God is available to all baptised Christians in this life.

Our Lord says in the Beatitudes, ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God’ (Matthew 5:8), and the Church takes him at his word. Our ascetic struggle, of

which fasting is but a part, seeks to purify the heart and to dissipate the clouds of passions — pride, bitterness, self-centredness, greed, vanity, hatred, etc. — that surround it and blind us to the presence of God.
As this darkness gradually fades, our vision becomes clearer, and we become capable of seeing the glory of God and participating in his divine life in a real and perceptible way.
In other words, the Church does not ask us to believe in something that cannot be verified, nor to struggle for rewards we have no assurance of. Rather, by setting before us today the person of St Gregory Palamas, she reminds us that ‘the Kingdom of God is at hand’.
The Church couples this with another message of encouragement from today’s Gospel reading about the paralytic whose friends brought him past the crowds and into the house where Jesus was teaching by lowering him down through the roof. The man, though unable to do anything for himself, was healed and saved through the effort and faith of his friends. Confronted with our own shortcomings, failures, and weaknesses, the Church now reminds us that we are not alone.
The common periods and days of fasting are established precisely for this reason, that our struggle be a common one, where we do not face our enemy (the passions) alone, but together.
As we say repeatedly in the Liturgy, ‘With all the saints, let us entrust ourselves and one another, and our whole life, to Christ our God’.
When we lack strength to push through the throng of life’s cares in order to approach Christ, we can take courage from the fact that the Church, our brothers and sisters in Christ, are there to help carry us to him.
Let us then ‘bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ’ (Galatians 6:2). Printed by Athina Press Oeconomos Kristian Akselber



Day 13-Mar-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Translation of the Relics (847) of St Nicephoros, Patriarch of Constantinople (827)

His main commemoration is on June 2; today we commemorate the return of his holy relics to Constantinople.

Nicephoros was Patriarch during the time of the iconoclasts, and openly opposed the Emperor Leo the Armenian's heretical policies. For this he was exiled to a monastery on the island of Prochonis, which he himself had built when Patriarch. After living there for thirteen years, he reposed around 827. In time, the iconoclast Emperors died, and the Emperor Michael, with his mother Theodora, came to the Imperial throne in 842; they appointed Methodios, a defender of the icons, as Patriarch. In 846, the incorrupt relics of St Nicephoros were returned to Constantinople and placed first in the Hagia Sophia, then in the Church of the Holy Apostles. The saint had been driven from Constantinople on March 13, and his relics were returned there on March 13, nineteen years later to the day.

Saint Christina the Persian

Hieromartyr Publius, Bishop of Athens

Day 13-Mar-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Isaiah 8:13-9:7; Genesis 6:9-22; Proverbs 8:1-21

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 8:13-9:7 But the LORD of hosts, him you shall regard as holy; let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.
And he will become a sanctuary, and a stone of offense, and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.
And many shall stumble thereon; they shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.
Bind up the testimony, seal the teaching among my disciples.
I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him.
Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion.
And when they say to you, 'Consult the mediums and the wizards who chirp and mutter,' should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the teaching and to the testimony! Surely for this word which they speak there is no dawn.
They will pass through the land, greatly distressed and hungry; and when they are hungry, they will be enraged and will curse their king and their God, and turn their faces upward; and they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish; and they will be thrust into thick darkness.
But there will be no gloom for her that was in anguish.
In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.
The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined.
Thou hast multiplied the nation, thou hast increased its joy; they rejoice before thee as with joy at the harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil.
For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, thou hast broken as on the day of Midian.
For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire.
For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called 'Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David, and over his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and for evermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 6:9-22 These are the generations of Noah.
Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God.
And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.
Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence.
And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.
And God said to Noah, 'I have determined to make an end of all flesh; for the earth is filled with violence through them; behold, I will destroy them with the earth.
Make yourself an ark of gopher wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch.
This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its breadth fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits.
Make a roof for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above; and set the door of the ark in its side; make it with lower, second, and third decks.
For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall die.
But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you.
And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female.
Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground according to its kind, two of every sort shall come in to you, to keep them alive.
Also take with you every sort of food that is eaten, and store it up; and it shall serve as food for you and for them.
Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.

Old Testament Reading: Proverbs 8:1-21 Does not wisdom call, does not understanding raise her voice? On the heights beside the way, in the paths she takes her stand; beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries aloud: 'To you, O men, I call, and my cry is to the sons of men.
O simple ones, learn prudence; O foolish men, pay attention.
Hear, for I will speak noble things, and from my lips will come what is right; for my mouth will utter truth; wickedness is an abomination to my lips.
All the words of my mouth are righteous; there is nothing twisted or crooked in them.
They are all straight to him who understands and right to those who find knowledge.

Take my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold; for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.
I, wisdom, dwell in prudence, and I find knowledge and discretion.
The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil.
Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.
I have counsel and sound wisdom, I have insight, I have strength.
By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just; by me princes rule, and nobles govern the earth.
I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me.
Riches and honor are with me, enduring wealth and prosperity.
My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold, and my yield than choice silver.
I walk in the way of righteousness, in the paths of justice, endowing with wealth those who love me, and filling their treasuries.

Day 14-Mar-2023 Tuesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

St Benedict of Nursia, abbot (547)

His name, Benedictus, means "Blessed" in Latin. He was born in 480 in Nursia, a small town northeast of Rome. He had only rudimentary schooling: he wrote later of his fear that through book-learning he might 'lose the great understanding of my soul.' At an early age he fled to a monastery where he was tonsured; he then withdrew to a remote mountain, where he lived or several years in a cave, perfecting himself in prayer. His only food was some bread brought to him by Romanus, the monk who had tonsured him. When he became known in the area, he fled his cave to escape the attentions of the pious; but flight proved useless, and in time a community of monks formed around him. He was granted many spiritual gifts: he healed the sick and drove out evil spirits, raised the dead, and appeared in visions to others many miles away.

Benedict founded twelve monasteries, most famously that at Monte Cassino. Initially, each monastic house had twelve monks, to imitate the number of the Twelve Apostles. The Rule that he established for his monks was based on the works of St John Cassian and St Basil the Great, and became a standard for western monasteries. Thus he is sometimes called the first teacher of monks in the West.

Six days before his death, the Saint ordered that his grave be opened, gathered all his monks together, gave them counsel, then gave his soul back to God on the day that he had predicted. At the moment of his death, two monks in different places had the same vision: they saw a path from earth to heaven, richly adorned and lined on either side with ranks of people. At the top of the path stood a man, clothed in light and unspeakably beautiful, who told them that the path was prepared for Benedict, the beloved of God. In this way, the monks learned that their abbot had gone to his rest.

<u>Kontakion</u>

O sun that shinest with the Mystic Dayspring’s radiance, who didst enlighten the monastics of the western lands, thou art worthily the namesake of

benediction; do thou purge us of the filth of passions thoroughly by the sweat of thine illustrious accomplishments, for we cry to thee: Rejoice, O thrice-blessed Benedict.

St Theognostus, Metropolitan of Kiev (1353)

He was born in Greece and succeeded St Peter of Kiev as Metropolitan of that city. Some of his enemies among his own flock denounced him to the Mongol ruler, saying that he had collected no tribute from his churches to pay to the Mongols. Summoned before the Mongol prince and asked about this, he answered 'Christ our God bought His Church from the unbelievers with His precious Blood. For what do we pay tribute to unbelievers?' Returning home, he governed the Church for twenty-five more years and reposed in peace in 1353.

Saint Euschemon, Bishop of Lampsacus

Day 14-Mar-2023 Tuesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Isaiah 9:9-10:4; Genesis 7:1-5; Proverbs 8:32-9:11

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 9:9-10:4
Thus says the LORD: 'And all the people will know, Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria, who say in pride and in arrogance of heart: ‘The bricks have fallen, but we will build with dressed stones; the sycamores have been cut down, but we will put cedars in their place.
' So the LORD raises adversaries against them, and stirs up their enemies.
The Syrians on the east and the Philistines on the west devour Israel with open mouth.
For all this his anger is not turned away and his hand is stretched out still.
The people did not turn to him who smote them, nor seek the LORD of hosts.
So the LORD cut off from Israel head and tail, palm branch and reed in one day – the elder and honored man is the head, and the prophet who teaches lies is the tail; for those who lead this people lead them astray, and those who are led by them are swallowed up.
Therefore the Lord does not rejoice over their young men, and has no compassion on their fatherless and widows; for every one is godless and an evildoer, and every mouth speaks folly.
For all this his anger is not turned away and his hand is stretched out still.
For wickedness burns like a fire, it consumes briers and thorns; it kindles the thickets of the forest, and they roll upward in a column of smoke.
Through the wrath of the LORD of hosts the land is burned, and the people are like fuel for the fire; no man spares his brother.
They snatch on the right, but are still hungry, and they devour on the left, but are not satisfied; each devours his neighbor’s flesh, Manasseh, Ephraim, and Ephraim, Manasseh, and together they are against Judah.
For all this his anger is not turned away and his hand is stretched out still.
Woe to those who decree iniquitous decrees, and the writers who keep writing oppression, to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right, that widows may be their spoil, and that they may make the fatherless their prey! What will you do on the day of punishment, in the storm which will come from afar? To whom will you flee for help, and where will you leave your wealth?
Nothing remains but to crouch among the prisoners or fall among the slain.
For all this his anger is not turned away and his hand is stretched out still.

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 7:1-5
Then the LORD said to Noah, 'Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation.
Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and his mate; and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and his mate; and seven pairs of the birds of the air also, male and female, to keep their kind alive upon the face of all the earth.
For in seven days I will send rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights; and every living thing that I have made I will blot out from the face of the ground.
And Noah did all that the LORD had commanded him.

Old Testament Reading: Proverbs 8:32-9:11 And now, my sons, listen to me: happy are those who keep my ways.
Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it.
Happy is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors.
For he who finds me finds life and obtains favor from the LORD; but he who misses me injures himself; all who hate me love death.
Wisdom has built her house, she has set up her seven pillars.
She has slaughtered her beasts, she has mixed her wine, she has also set her table.
She has sent out her maids to call from the highest places in the town, 'Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!' To him who is without sense she says, 'Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed.
Leave simpleness, and live, and walk in the way of insight.
He who corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse, and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury.
Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; reprove a wise man, and he will love you.
Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man and he will increase in learning.
The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.
For by me your days will be multiplied, and years will be added to your life.

Day 15-Mar-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Martyr Agapius and seven with him (303)

These holy Martyrs contested during the reign of Diocletian 284-305), in Palestinian Caesarea. All eight were very young; only Agapius was a baptized Christian. Urbanus, the governor of the region, observed a pagan festival by having some Christians publicly tortured and executed: some by fire, others on the gallows, some by being thrown to wild beasts in the arena. Six of the youths (Timolaus, Dionysius, Romulus, Plesius, and two named Alexander), seeing the patience and serenity with which the Christians endured their torments, were reached by the Holy Spirit and, tying their own hands, presented themselves to Urbanus saying 'We too are Christians!' They were immediately cast into prison. A few days later Agapius, a prominent Christian in that town, also presented himself along with a second Dionysius. All eight were beheaded together at Caesarea. Their martyrdom is recorded in Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History.

Holy Martyr Alexander (270-275)

"He was from the town of Side in Pamphylia. The Emperor Aurelian's governor asked him who he was, to which Alexander replied that he was a pastor of the flock of Christ. 'And where is this flock of Christ', further enquired the evil and suspicious governor. Alexander replied: 'Over the whole world live the people whom Christ the Lord created, among whom those who believe in Him are His sheep, but those who have fallen away from their Creator, who are enslaved to creation and the work of men's hands, to dead idols, such as you, are strangers to His flock, and at the Dreadful Judgement of God will be put to the left with the goats.' The wicked judge first commanded that he be whipped with iron flails and then thrown into a burning furnace. But the fire could in no way harm him. Then he was flayed and after that thrown to the wild beasts. But the beasts would not touch him. At last the governor ordered that he be beheaded. But as soon as the judge pronounced the sentence, an evil spirit took hold of him and made him rabid. He was led howling to his gods, the idols, but on the way the evil spirit wrested his wicked soul from him. St Alexander suffered between 270 and 275.' (Prologue)

Holy Apostle Aristobulus of the Seventy, first Bishop of Britain (1st c.)

"He was the brother of the Apostle Barnabas and was born in Cyprus. He was a follower of the Apostle Paul, who mentions him in his Epistle to the Romans (16:10). When the great Apostle Paul created many bishops for different parts

of the world, he made this Aristobulus bishop of Britain (i.e. England). In Britain there was a wild people, pagan and wicked, and Aristobulus endured among them unmentionable torments, misfortunes and malice. They smote him without mercy, dragged him through the streets, mocked him and jeered at him. But in the end this holy man came to success by the power of the grace of God. He enlightened the people, baptised them in the name of Christ the Lord, built churches, ordained priests and deacons and finally died there in peace and went to the Kingdom of the Lord whom he had served so faithfully." (Prologue)
Holy Martyr Nicander the Egyptian
Manuel the New Martyr of Crete

Day 15-Mar-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Isaiah 10:12-20; Genesis 7:6-9; Proverbs 9:12-18

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 10:12-20
When the Lord has finished all his work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem he will punish the arrogant boasting of the king of Assyria and his haughty pride.
For he says: 'By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I have understanding; I have removed the boundaries of peoples, and have plundered their treasures; like a bull I have brought down those who sat on thrones.
My hand has found like a nest the wealth of the peoples; and as men gather eggs that have been forsaken so I have gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved a wing, or opened the mouth, or chirped.
Shall the axe vaunt itself over him who hews with it, or the saw magnify itself against him who wields it? As if a rod should wield him who lifts it, or as if a staff should lift him who is not wood! Therefore the Lord, the LORD of hosts, will send wasting sickness among his stout warriors, and under his glory a burning will be kindled, like the burning of fire.
The light of Israel will become a fire, and his Holy One a flame; and it will burn and devour his thorns and briers in one day.
The glory of his forest and of his fruitful land the LORD will destroy, both soul and body, and it will be as when a sick man wastes away.
The remnant of the trees of his forest will be so few that a child can write them down.
In that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean upon him that smote them, but will lean upon the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth.

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 7:6-9
Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters came upon the earth.
And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him went into the ark, to escape the waters of the flood.
Of clean animals, and of animals that are not clean, and of birds, and of everything that creeps on the ground, two and two, male and female, went into the ark with Noah, as God had commanded Noah.

Old Testament Reading: Proverbs 9:12-18
If you are wise, you are wise for yourself; if you scoff, you alone will bear it.
A foolish woman is noisy; she is wanton and knows no shame.
She sits at the door of her house, she takes a seat on the high places of the town, calling to those who pass by, who are going straight on their way, 'Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!' And to him who is without sense she says, 'Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.
But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.

Day 16-Mar-2023 Thursday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Martyr Sabinas of Hermopolis, Egypt (287)

He was the administrator (we would say mayor) of the city of Hermopolis in Egypt. During a persecution, he and many other Christians fled to the mountains, where Sabinas shut himself in a hut and spent his days in fasting and prayer. But a poor man who brought him food (and whom Sabinas had helped in many ways) betrayed him to the authorities for two pieces of gold. Sabinas and six others were arrested, bound and brought before the governor Arian. After harsh torture, Sabinas was drowned in the Nile.

Our Holy Father Christodoulos, Wonderworker of Patmos (1111)

He was from the region of Nicaea, and was named John by his parents Theodore and Anna. He took up the monastic life at an early age, and was renamed Christodoulos ('Slave of Christ'). After going far in the ascetical life, he was given permission by the Emperor Alexis I (1081-1118) to establish a church and monastery on the island of Patmos, dedicated to St John the Evangelist. Both the church and the monastery stand and continue in use to this day. When Patmos was attacked by the Arabs, he and his disciples fled to Euboea, where he reposed. The Saint's disciples brought his relics back to his own monastery, where they continue to work miracles today.

Day 16-Mar-2023 Thursday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Isaiah 11:10-12:2; Genesis 7:11-8:3; Proverbs 10:1-22

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 11:10-12:2
Thus says the LORD: In that day the root of Jesse shall stand as an ensign to the peoples; him shall the nations seek, and his dwellings shall be glorious.
In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant which is left of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Ethiopia, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea.
He will raise an ensign for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.
The jealousy of Ephraim shall depart, and those who harass Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not be jealous of Judah, and Judah shall not harass Ephraim.
But they shall swoop down upon the shoulder of the Philistines in the west, and together they shall plunder the people of the east.
They shall put forth their hand against Edom and Moab, and the Ammonites shall obey them.
And the LORD will utterly destroy the tongue of the sea of Egypt; and will wave his hand over the River with his scorching wind, and smite it into seven channels that men may cross dryshod.
And there will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant which is left of his people, as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt.
You will say in that day: 'I will give thanks to thee, O LORD, for though thou wast angry with me, thy anger turned away, and thou didst comfort me.
'Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 7:11-8:3
In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened.
And rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights.
On the very same day Noah and his sons, Shem and Ham and Japheth, and Noah’s wife and the three wives of his sons with them entered the ark, they and every beast according to its kind, and all the cattle according to their kinds, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth according to its kind, and every bird according to its kind, every bird of every sort.

They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life.
And they that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him; and the LORD shut him in.
The flood continued forty days upon the earth; and the waters increased, and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth.
The waters prevailed and increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark floated on the face of the waters.
And the waters prevailed so mightily upon the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered; the waters prevailed above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep.
And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, birds, cattle, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm upon the earth, and every man; everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died.
He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the air; they were blotted out from the earth.
Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark.
And the waters prevailed upon the earth a hundred and fifty days.
But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark.
And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided; the fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed, the rain from the heavens was restrained, and the waters receded from the earth continually.
At the end of a hundred and fifty days the waters had abated.

Old Testament Reading: Proverbs 10:1-22 A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is a sorrow to his mother.
Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit, but righteousness delivers from death.
The LORD does not let the righteous go hungry, but he thwarts the craving of the wicked.
A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.
A son who gathers in summer is prudent, but a son who sleeps in harvest brings shame.
Blessings are on the head of the righteous, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.
The memory of the righteous is a blessing, but the name of the wicked will rot.
The wise of heart will heed commandments, but a prating fool will come to ruin.
He who walks in integrity walks securely, but he who perverts his ways will be found out.
He who winks the eye causes trouble, but he who boldly reproves makes peace.
The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked

conceals violence.
Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses.
On the lips of him who has understanding wisdom is found, but a rod is for the back of him who lacks sense.
Wise men lay up knowledge, but the babbling of a fool brings ruin near.
A rich man’s wealth is his strong city; the poverty of the poor is their ruin.
The wage of the righteous leads to life, the gain of the wicked to sin.
He who heeds instruction is on the path to life, but he who rejects reproof goes astray.
He who conceals hatred has lying lips, and he who utters slander is a fool.
When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is prudent.
The tongue of the righteous is choice silver; the mind of the wicked is of little worth.
The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of sense.
The blessing of the LORD makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it.

Day 17-Mar-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

St Alexis, the Man of God (411)

He was born of pious and noble parents in Rome in the time of the Emperor Honorius. His parents, Euphemianus and Agalais, set a high standard of godly living: his father, though wealthy, sat down to dine only once a day, at sunset. By his parents' arrangement Alexis was married at a young age. However, without ever living with his new wife, he fled to Edessa in Mesopotamia, where he lived in asceticism for eighteen years, presenting himself as a beggar in order to avoid the praise of men. When, despite his efforts, he began to be known as a holy man, he fled the city and took ship for Laodicea. By divine providence, the ship was blown off course and forced to land in Rome. Taking this as a sign, Alexis, still disguised as a beggar, returned to his parents' house, where he sat at the gates, unrecognized by any of his family. His father, not knowing who he was, allowed him to live in a hut in his courtyard. There Alexis spent another seventeen years, living only on bread and water. He died clutching a piece of paper on which he had revealed his true identity. At the time of his death, the pope of Rome heard a voice saying "Look for the Man of God," and revealing where he should look. It is said that the Emperor Honorius, the Pope and a large retinue came to the house, where they found Alexis dead in his tiny hut, his face shining like the sun. His parents and wife were at first overcome with grief to learn that their son and husband had been secretly living near them, but they were comforted when they saw that his body healed the sick and exuded a fragrant myrrh. Thus they knew that God had glorified him. His head is preserved at the Church of St Laurus on the Peloponnese.

St Patrick, Enlightener of Ireland (~461)

"Saint Patrick, the Apostle of the Irish, was seized from his native Britain by Irish marauders when he was sixteen years old. Though the son of a deacon and grandson of a priest, it was not until his captivity that he sought out the Lord with his whole heart. In his Confession, the testament he wrote towards the end of his life, he says, 'After I came to Ireland — every day I had to tend

sheep, and many times a day I prayed — the love of God and His fear came to me more and more, and my faith was strengthened. And my spirit was so moved that in a single day I would say as many as a hundred prayers, and almost as many at night, and this even when I was staying in the woods and on the mountain; and I would rise for prayer before daylight, through snow, through frost, through rain, and I felt no harm."

After six years of slavery in Ireland, he was guided by God to make his escape, and afterwards struggled in the monastic life in Aesir in Gaul [now France], under the guidance of the holy Bishop Germanus. Many years later he was ordained bishop and sent to Ireland once again, about the year 432, to convert the Irish to Christ. His arduous labours bore so much fruit that within seven years, three bishops were sent from Gaul to help him shepherd his flock, 'my brethren and sons whom I have baptized in the Lord -- so many thousands of people,' he says in his Confession.

His apostolic work was not accomplished without much 'weariness and painfulness,' long journeys through difficult country, and many perils; he says his very life was in danger twelve times. When he came to Ireland, as its enlightener, it was a pagan country; when he ended his earthly life some thirty years later, about 461, the Faith of Christ was established in every corner." (Great Horologion)

The work of St Patrick and his brethren has been called the most successful single missionary venture in the history of the Church.

It is said of St Patrick that he chanted the entire Psalter every day.

Dismissal hymn of Saint Patrick. Third Tone
O Holy Hierarch, equal of the Apostles, Saint Patrick, wonderworker and enlightener of Ireland: Intercede with the merciful God that He grant unto our souls forgiveness of offences.

Kontakion of Saint Patrick. Fourth Tone
Be quick to anticipate The Master revealed you as a skilful fisher of men; and casting forth nets of Gospel preaching, you hauled up the heathen to piety. Those who were the children of idolatrous darkness you rendered sons of day through holy Baptism. O Patrick, intercede for us who honour your memory.

Holy Martyr Marinus
Venerable Theostérictus

Day 17-Mar-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Isaiah 13:2-13; Genesis 8:4-21; Proverbs 10:31-11:12

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 13:2-13
On a bare hill raise a signal, cry aloud to them; wave the hand for them to enter the gates of the nobles.
I myself have commanded my consecrated ones, have summoned my mighty men to execute my anger, my proudly exulting ones.
Hark, a tumult on the mountains as of a great multitude! Hark, an uproar of kingdoms, of nations gathering together! The LORD of hosts is mustering a host for battle.
They come from a distant land, from the end of the heavens, the LORD and the weapons of his indignation, to destroy the whole earth.
Wail, for the day of the LORD is near; as destruction from the Almighty it will come!
Therefore all hands will be feeble, and every man's heart will melt, and they will be dismayed.
Pangs and agony will seize them; they will be in anguish like a woman in travail. They will look aghast at one another; their faces will be aflame.
Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the earth a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it.
For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising and the moon will not shed its light.
I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pride of the arrogant, and lay low the haughtiness of the ruthless.
I will make men more rare than fine gold, and mankind than the gold of Ophir.
Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the LORD of hosts in the day of his fierce anger.

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 8:4-21
And in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest upon the mountains of Ararat.
And the waters continued to abate until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were seen.
At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made, and sent forth a raven; and it went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth.

Then he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground; but the dove found no place to set her foot, and she returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth.
So he put forth his hand and took her and brought her into the ark with him.
He waited another seven days, and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark; and the dove came back to him in the evening, and lo, in her mouth a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth.
Then he waited another seven days, and sent forth the dove; and she did not return to him any more.
In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried from off the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and behold, the face of the ground was dry.
In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry.
Then God said to Noah, 'Go forth from the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you.
Bring forth with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh – birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth – that they may breed abundantly on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply upon the earth.
So Noah went forth, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him.
And every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves upon the earth, went forth by families out of the ark.
Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.
And when the LORD smelled the pleasing odor, the LORD said in his heart, 'I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.

Old Testament Reading: Proverbs 10:31-11:12 The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but the perverse tongue will be cut off.
The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked, what is perverse.
A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is his delight.
When pride comes, then comes disgrace; but with the humble is wisdom.
The integrity of the upright guides them, but the crookedness of the treacherous destroys them.
Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.
The righteousness of the blameless keeps his way straight, but the wicked falls by his own wickedness.
The righteousness of the upright delivers them, but the treacherous are taken captive by their lust.
When the wicked dies, his hope perishes, and the expectation of the godless comes to nought.

The righteous is delivered from trouble, and the wicked gets into it instead.
With his mouth the godless man would destroy his neighbor, but by knowledge the righteous are delivered.
When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices; and when the wicked perish there are shouts of gladness.
By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.
He who belittles his neighbor lacks sense, but a man of understanding remains silent.

Day 18-Mar-2023 Saturday

Fast Day ; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

St Cyril, archbishop of Jerusalem (386)

He was born in Jerusalem in 315, ordained to the priesthood in 346, and succeeded Maximus as Archbishop of Jerusalem in 350. He was exiled three times by the Arian Emperors Constantius and Valens for his unwavering defense of the Faith. Restored by the Emperor Theodosius, he did not return to the throne, but lived for eight years in peace before reposing in 386.

He was known to all his people as a tireless defender of the poor, and as a great ascetic. He was gentle and humble in his bearing, pale and gaunt from fasting. He struggled throughout his time against the Arian heresy, which had become very strong, claiming the allegiance even of the Emperors. In addition, he lived through the reign of Julian the Apostate, who tried by many means to weaken and undermine the Church and the Christian Faith.

Of St Cyril's many writings, the best-known are his Catecheses, considered the oldest systematic summary of Christian teaching.

St Ananias (Aninus) the Wonderworker (?)

"Born in Chalcedon, he was little of stature, like Zaccheus, but great in spirit and faith. He denied himself to the world at the age of fifteen and settled near the River Euphrates in a little hut, where he atoned for his sins, and prayed to God, at first with his teacher Mayum and then, after Mayum's death, alone. By the power of his prayers he filled an empty well with water, healed the sick of various pains and tamed wild beasts. There was a tamed lion with him as his servant. He had insight into distant happenings. When robbers attacked a stylite, Pionius, at some distance from him, and beat him up to such an extent that he decided to come down from his pillar and go to complain to the judges, St Aninus saw his intention in his soul and sent him a letter by means of his lion, telling him to set aside his intention, to forgive his assaulters and to continue in his asceticism. He was inexpressibly generous. The bishop of Neo-Caesarea made a gift to him of a donkey, to ease his carrying of water from the river, but he gave this donkey to some poor man who had

complained to him of his poverty. The bishop gave him a second donkey, but he gave that away. Then the bishop gave him a third donkey, not for his own but only to serve as a water-carrier, to be kept and returned. At the time of his death, he saw Moses, Aaron and Or coming to him and calling: 'Aninus, the Lord is calling you. Get up and come with us.' This he revealed to his disciples, and gave his spirit to the Lord whom he had served so faithfully. He was 110 years old when he finished his earthly course." (Prologue)

Saint Nikolai (Velimirovic), Bishop of Ochrid and Zica, Serbia (1956)(March 5 OC)

He has been called 'The New Chrysostom' for his many grace-filled sermons and writings.

He was born in 1880 in the Serbian village of Lelich. After attending the Seminary of St Sava in Belgrade, he obtained doctoral degrees from both the University of Berne and Oxford University. In 1919, Archimandrite Nikolai was made Bishop of Zica.

In 1941 Bishop Nikolai was arrested by the Nazis and, after three years' imprisonment in Ljubostir Vojlovici Monastery, was sent to the infamous Dachau concentration camp along with the Serbian Patriarch Gavrilo. He both witnessed and personally underwent many tortures there until the camp was liberated by the US army in 1945.

After the war he fled Communist-controlled Yugoslavia and emigrated to the United States, where he taught at St Sava's Seminary, St Vladimir Seminary and St Tikhon seminary. It was at St Tikhon Seminary that he reposed in 1956. His relics rested for awhile at St Sava's Seminary in Libertyville IL, then were returned to Serbia, where they now reside.

Throughout his adult life, the holy monk and bishop poured forth a steady stream of beautiful homilies and theological and spiritual writings. He is the author of the Prologue from Ochrid, a Slavic Synaxarion. The luminous homilies included therein, one for each day of the year, give a good sample of his inspired writing.

His feast is kept on this day (March 5 OC, March 18 NC) by Orthodox Christians on both the Old and New Calendars.

Saints Trophimus and Eucarpion and Companion Martyrs

Day 18-Mar-2023 Saturday

Fast Day ; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.
Readings of the day: Hebrews 10:32-38; Mark 2:14-17
Fast Day (Wine and Oil Allowed) Epistle Reading: St.
Paul's Letter to the Hebrews 10:32-38 Brethren, recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated.
For you had compassion on the prisoners, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.
Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.
For you have need of endurance, so that you may do the will of God and receive what is promised.
'For yet a little while, and the coming one shall come and shall not tarry; but my righteous one shall live by faith.

Gospel Reading: Mark 2:14-17 At that time, as Jesus passed on, he saw Levi the son of Alphaios sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, 'Follow me.
And he rose and followed him.
And as he sat at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were sitting with Jesus and his disciples; for there were many who followed him.
And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?' And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.

Day 19-Mar-2023 Sunday

Fast Day ; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Martyrs Chrysanthos and Daria, and those with them at Rome (283)

Chrysanthos was the only son of Polemon, a prominent pagan in Rome. As befit his status, he was given every opportunity for secular learning, but seemed unable to acquire worldly wisdom. By God's providence, copies of the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles came into his possession and, reading them avidly, he was enlightened and desired above all to be a Christian. He found a priest, Carpophorus, who instructed him in the Faith and baptised him. When his father discovered Chrysanthos' conversion, he was angry and did everything he could to turn his son back to paganism, using even threats and imprisonment. When none of these measures worked, Polemon arranged for his son to be married to a beautiful and learned young pagan woman named Daria, hoping that affection for her would draw his son away from Christ. But instead, Chrysanthus persuaded Daria of the truth of Christianity, and she was secretly baptised.

When his father died, Chrysanthus and his wife began to confess Christ openly and to live publicly as Christians. They were soon arrested and grievously tortured for their faith. The torturer, whose name was Claudius, was so moved by their endurance and patience that he himself embraced the Faith, along with his whole household. For this they were executed: Claudius by drowning, his two sons by beheading, and his wife by hanging. Finally Chrysanthus and Daria were buried alive in a pit and covered with stones. This was during the reign of the Emperor Numerian.

Apolytikion

Thy Martyrs, O Lord, in their courageous contest for Thee received as the prize the crowns of incorruption and life from Thee, our immortal God. For since they possessed Thy strength, they cast down the tyrants and wholly destroyed the demons’ strengthless presumption. O Christ God, by their prayers, save our souls, since Thou art merciful.

Holy Martyr Pancharius
Holy New Martyr Demetrius
Venerable Innocent of Komel
Venerable Bassa of Pskov

Day 19-Mar-2023 Sunday

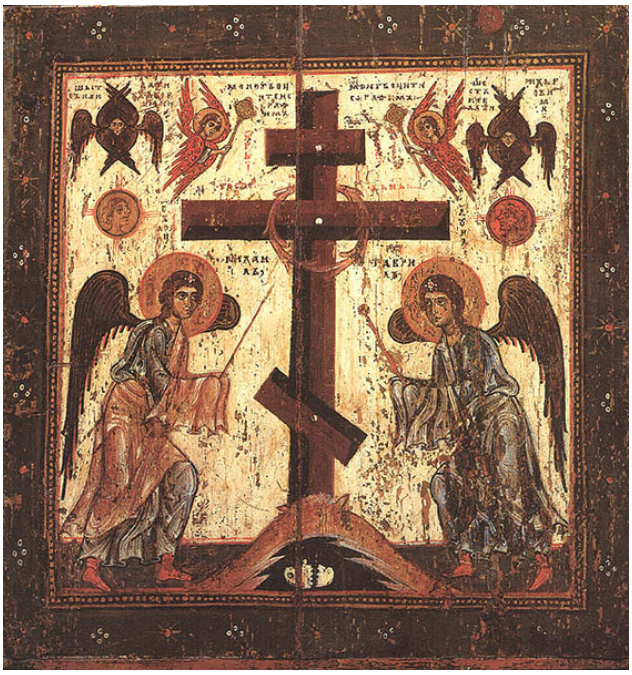
Fast Day ; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Gospel Reading: Sunday of the Holy Cross
Hebrews 4:14-5:6; Mark 8:34-9:1

Epistle Reading: St.
Paul’s Letter to the Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:1-6 BRETHREN, since we have a high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.
For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.
Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.
For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.
He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness.
Because of this he is bound to offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people.
And one does not take the honor upon himself, but he is called by God, just as Aaron was.
So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, 'Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee'; as he says also in another place, 'Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek.

Gospel Reading: Sunday of the Holy Cross

The Lord said: 'If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.
For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.
For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? For what can a man give in return for his life? For whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.
And he said to them, 'Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.



SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING

What does it mean to take up the Cross daily? It is not just a question of being prepared to die for Christ, but it is more a question of being prepared to live for Christ.

As St. Paul tells us we are called to «offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God - this is your true and proper worship» (Rom. 12: 1-3), and likewise St. Peter tells us «you also like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ» (1 Pet. 2: 4-6). Christ gave his life for us, and asks us to give our lives to Him.

The offering of our lives is to be daily, and is hardest on the difficult days, the days when we are made to feel uncomfortable and unwelcome for being Christians. The difficult days would be difficult no matter where we are or who we are. They would be no easier in a monastery, nor would we find them easier if we were saints.

Saints only become saints by following Christ on the difficult days, the days when they don't really feel like doing it. However the difficult days do become easier with time and practice.

We can prepare for them through the daily practice of prayer and love for our fellow men. We can set about righting the wrongs we've done on the bad days when we failed, through the practice of virtue and learning from our mistakes.

A bad day is much easier to face if we have some idea as to what we could do better next time. Turning a bad day into a good day is one of the deep joys of the Christian life. It is the process that saints have become accomplished in doing.

It is the process that Christ himself went through by changing the sad day of His death into the glorious day of His Resurrection.

It was the days on which he restored Sts. Peter and Thomas to love and fellowship with Himself and their fellow Disciples. It was the day on which the prodigal son decided to return to his father's house.

Most days though are actually the opposite where we have to ensure that a good day doesn't turn bad. This is where true sanctity becomes developed. Despite how we might feel when we wake up, every day starts out good: «This is the day that the Lord has made» (Psal. 118). Let us take courage and ask Christ and his Saints to strengthen us on all days.

ON THE HOLY CROSS attributed to St. John Chrysostom

Let us consider of what great blessings for us Christ's Cross has become the cause. For though the Lord's Cross sounds sad and bitter, it is in reality full of joy and radiance.

For the Cross is the salvation of the Church; the Cross is the boast of those who hope in it; the Cross is reconciliation of enemies to God and conversion of sinners to Christ.

For through the Cross we have been delivered from enmity, and through the Cross we have been joined in friendship to God.

Through the Cross we have been freed from the tyranny of the devil, and through the Cross we have been delivered from death and destruction. 'When the Cross was not proclaimed, we were held fast by death; now the, Cross is proclaimed, and we have.

Come to despise death, as though it did not exist, while we have come to long for everlasting life. 'When the Cross was not proclaimed, we were strangers to paradise; but when the Cross appeared, at once a thief was found worthy of paradise.

From such darkness the human race has crossed over to infinite light; from death it has been called to everlasting life, from corruption it has been renewed for incorruption. For the eyes of the heart are no longer covered by the darkness that comes through ignorance, but through the Cross they are flooded with the light of knowledge. The ears of the deaf are no longer shut by unbelief, for the deaf have heard the word of the Lord, and the blind have recovered their sight to see the glory of God. These are the gifts we are given through the Cross.

What blessing has not been achieved for us through the Cross? The Cross is proclaimed, and faith in God is confessed and truth prevails in the whole inhabited world.

The Cross is proclaimed, and martyrs are revealed and confession of Christ prevails. The Cross is proclaimed, and the resurrection is revealed, life is made manifest, the kingdom of heaven is assured.

The Cross has become the cause of all these things, and through the Cross we have been taught to sing. What then is more precious than the Cross? What more profitable for our souls? So let us not be ashamed to name the Cross, but let us confess it with total confidence.

Day 20-Mar-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Our righteous Fathers martyred at the Monastery of St Sabbas the Sanctified (633? 796?)

The holy Monastery of St Sabbas is still in existence today, by the providence of God, though several times in its history it has been plundered and left empty. At one time it was attacked by Arab raiders. The monks considered fleeing, but their abbot, Thomas, said, 'We have fled from the world into this wilderness for the love of Christ; it would be shameful for us now to flee from the wilderness for fear of men. If we are killed here, we shall be killed through love for Christ, for whose sake we have come here to live.' So the monks agreed with one mind to wait their attackers unarmed. The Arabs killed some with arrows, and shut some in the cave of St Sabbas, lighting a fire at the entrance to suffocate them with smoke. The whole company of monks were thus privileged to give their lives for Christ's sake.

Accounts of the date differ substantially: the Great Horologion says that they died during the reign of the Emperor Heraclius, when St Modestus was Patriarch of Jerusalem (632-634); the Prologue that they died in 796 during the reign of Constantine and Irene, when Elias was Patriarch of Jerusalem.

St Photine the Samaritan Woman (66)

See her commemoration on February 26.

St Cuthbert the Wonderworker, Bishop of Lindisfarne (687)

'Saint Cuthbert was born in Britain about the year 635, and became a monk in his youth at the monastery of Melrose by the River Tweed. After many years of struggle as a true priest of Christ, in the service both of his own brethren and of the neglected Christians of isolated country villages, he became a solitary on Farne Island in 676. After eight years as a hermit, he was constrained to leave his quiet to become Bishop of Lindisfarne, in which office he served for almost two years. He returned to his hermitage two months before he reposed in peace in 687.

'Because of the miracles he wrought both during his life and at his tomb after death, he is called the "Wonderworker of Britain." The whole English people honoured him, and kings were both benefactors to his shrine and suppliants of his prayers. Eleven years after his death, his holy relics were revealed to be incorrupt; when his body was translated from Lindisfarne to Durham Cathedral in August of 1104, his body was still found to be untouched by decay, giving off "an odour of the sweetest fragrancy," and "from the flexibility of its joints representing a person asleep rather than dead." Finally,

when the most impious Henry VIII desecrated his shrine, opening it to despoil it of its valuables, his body was again found incorrupt, and was buried in 1542. It is believed that after this the holy relics of Saint Cuthbert were hidden to preserve them from further desecration.' (Great Horologion)

Myron the New Martyr of Crete
Venerable Michael the Sabaite
Venerable Euphrosynus of the Blue Lake

Day 20-Mar-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Isaiah 14:24-32; Genesis 8:21-9:7; Proverbs 11:19-12:6

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 14:24-32
The LORD of hosts has sworn: 'As I have planned, so shall it be, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand, that I will break the Assyrian in my land, and upon my mountains trample him under foot; and his yoke shall depart from them, and his burden from their shoulder.
This is the purpose that is purposed concerning the whole earth; and this is the hand that is stretched out over all the nations.
For the LORD of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back? In the year that King Ahaz died came this oracle:
'Rejoice not, O Philistia, all of you, that the rod which smote you is broken, for from the serpent's root will come forth an adder, and its fruit will be a flying serpent.
And the first-born of the poor will feed, and the needy lie down in safety; but I will kill your root with famine, and your remnant I will slay.
Wail, O gate; cry, O city; melt in fear, O Philistia, all of you! For smoke comes out of the north, and there is no straggler in his ranks.
What will one answer the messengers of the nation? 'The LORD has founded Zion, and in her the afflicted of his people find refuge.

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 8:21-9:7
And when the LORD smelled the pleasing odor, the LORD said in his heart, 'I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.
While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.
And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.
The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every bird of the air, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered.
Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.
Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.

For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning; of every beast I will require it and of man; of every man's brother I will require the life of man.
Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image.
And you, be fruitful and multiply, bring forth abundantly on the earth and multiply in it.

Old Testament Reading: Proverbs 11:19-12:6
He who is steadfast in righteousness will live, but he who pursues evil will die.
Men of perverse mind are an abomination to the LORD, but those of blameless ways are his delight.
Be assured, an evil man will not go unpunished, but those who are righteous will be delivered.
Like a gold ring in a swine's snout is a beautiful woman without discretion.
The desire of the righteous ends only in good; the expectation of the wicked in wrath.
One man gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want.
A liberal man will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered.
The people curse him who holds back grain, but a blessing is on the head of him who sells it.
He who diligently seeks good seeks favor, but evil comes to him who searches for it.
He who trusts in his riches will wither, but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf.
He who troubles his household will inherit wind, and the fool will be servant to the wise.
The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, but lawlessness takes away lives.
If the righteous is requited on earth, how much more the wicked and the sinner!
Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid.
A good man obtains favor from the LORD, but a man of evil devices he condemns.
A man is not established by wickedness, but the root of the righteous will never be moved.
A good wife is the crown of her husband, but she who brings shame is like rottenness in his bones.
The thoughts of the righteous are just; the counsels of the wicked are treacherous.
The words of the wicked lie in wait for blood, but the mouth of the upright delivers men.

Day 21-Mar-2023 Tuesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Our Holy Father James the Confessor, bishop, of the Studion (8th c.)
His birthplace and the place of his episcopate are unknown. He was a monk of the Studion monastery in Constantinople, and a disciple of St Theodore the Studite. As a bishop he was severely persecuted by the iconoclasts in the time of the Emperor Constantine Copronymus, enduring hunger, imprisonment and mocking, thus earning the title "Confessor." Saint Theodore wrote a homily in honor of him.

Our Holy Father Serapion (366)
'A companion of St Antony the Great, he lived in the Nitrian desert, in charge of the monastery of Arsina which contained 11,000 monks. Palladius and Sozomenes gave him the title "the Great". He entered into rest in about 366. St Serapion wrote: "Do not think that sickness is grave; only sin is grave... Sickness leads us only to the tomb, but sin follows the sinner beyond it".' (Prologue)

Saint Thomas, Patriarch of Constantinople

Venerable Cyril, Bishop of Catania

Michael the New Martyr of Agrapha

Day 21-Mar-2023 Tuesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Isaiah 25:1-9; Genesis 9:8-17; Proverbs 12:8-22

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 25:1-9
O LORD, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure.
For thou hast made the city a heap, the fortified city a ruin; the palace of aliens is a city no more, it will never be rebuilt.
Therefore strong peoples will glorify thee; cities of ruthless nations will fear thee.
For thou hast been a stronghold to the poor, a stronghold to the needy in his distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat; for the blast of the ruthless is like a storm against a wall, like heat in a dry place.
Thou dost subdue the noise of the aliens; as heat by the shade of a cloud, so the song of the ruthless is stilled.
On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined.
And he will destroy on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations.
He will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth; for the LORD has spoken.
It will be said on that day, 'Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us.
This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 9:8-17
Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 'Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark.
I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.
And God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth. God said to Noah, 'This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth.

Old Testament Reading: Proverbs 12:8-22
A man is commended according to his good sense, but one of perverse mind is despised.
Better is a man of humble standing who works for himself than one who plays the great man but lacks bread.
A righteous man has regard for the life of his beast, but the mercy of the wicked is cruel.
He who tills his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits has no sense.
The strong tower of the wicked comes to ruin, but the root of the righteous stands firm.
An evil man is ensnared by the transgression of his lips, but the righteous escapes from trouble.
From the fruit of his words a man is satisfied with good, and the work of a man’s hand comes back to him.
The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.
The vexation of a fool is known at once, but the prudent man ignores an insult.
He who speaks the truth gives honest evidence, but a false witness utters deceit.
There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.
Truthful lips endure for ever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment.
Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, but those who plan good have joy.
No ill befalls the righteous, but the wicked are filled with trouble.
Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who act faithfully are his delight.

Day 22-Mar-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Hieromartyr Basil of Ancyra (362)

St Basil labored for the Church during the reign of Julian the Apostate, who briefly attempted to return the Roman empire to paganism after the reign of St Constantine. The Saint had already suffered for the Faith as bishop of Anycra (now Ankara,the capital of Turkey), and when Julian came to power, fresh persecutions began. Basil openly denounced the Emperor's anti-Christian policies, for which he was tortured and thrown in prison.

When the Emperor came to Ancyra, Basil was brought before him, and Julian urged the bishop to renounce the Faith, promising him wealth and position if he would do so. Basil replied, 'I believe in my Christ, whom you have denied and who gave you this earthly kingdom, but He will shortly take this from you. How can you have no shame before the altar under which you were saved from death as an eight-year-old child when they sought to kill you? Therefore He will soon make this earthly kingdom from you, and your body shall not be buried when you have spewed forth your soul in bitter torments.' The enraged Emperor ordered that seven strips be torn from Basil's body every day, a torture which was carried out for seven days. When the Saint was once again brought before the Emperor, he tore off a strip of his own flesh and threw it to Julian, saying 'Take this and eat it, Julian, if such food is sweet to you, but Christ is life for me.' At this the Emperor ordered that red-hot iron spits be driven through Basil; and thus the holy bishop at last received the crown of martyrdom.

Martyr Drosida of Antioch, and five nuns (104)

'The daughter of the Emperor Trajan, she was seized with five other women when they were gathering the bodies of the martyrs who had suffered for Christ by night, and was for this cruelly mutilated by the Emperor. The five women were terribly tortured and at last thrown into molten copper, where they surrendered their souls to their Lord. But Drosida remained under strict imperial guard. However, she escaped from the court and baptised herself in a river. After eight days she gave her soul into God's hands.' (Prologue)

Venerable Martyr Euthymius the Athonite
Holy Martyrs Callinica and Basilissa
Paul, Bishop of Narbonne

Day 22-Mar-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Isaiah 26:21-27:9; Genesis 9:18-10:1; Proverbs 12:23-13:9

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 26:21-27:9
For behold, the LORD is coming forth out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity, and the earth will disclose the blood shed upon her, and will no more cover her slain.
In that day the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea.
In that day: “A pleasant vineyard, sing of it! I, the LORD, am its keeper; every moment I water it.
Lest any one harm it, I guard it night and day; I have no wrath. Would that I had thorns and briers to battle! I would set out against them, I would burn them up together. Or let them lay hold of my protection, let them make peace with me, let them make peace with me.”
In days to come Jacob shall take root, Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots, and fill the whole world with fruit.
Has he smitten them as he smote those who smote them? Or have they been slain as their slayers were slain?
Measure by measure, by exile thou didst contend with them; he removed them with his fierce blast in the day of the east wind.
Therefore by this the guilt of Jacob will be expiated, and this will be the full fruit of the removal of his sin: when he makes all the stones of the altars like chalkstones crushed to pieces, no Asherim or incense altars will remain standing.

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 9:18-10:1
The sons of Noah who went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham was the father of Canaan. These three were the sons of Noah; and from these the whole earth was peopled.
Noah was the first tiller of the soil.
He planted a vineyard; and he drank of the wine, and became drunk, and lay uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside.
Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it upon both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father’s nakedness.

When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said, “Cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers.” He also said, “Blessed by the LORD my God be Shem; and let Canaan be his slave. God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem; and let Canaan be his slave.”
After the flood Noah lived three hundred and fifty years. All the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years; and he died. These are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth; sons were born to them after the flood.

Old Testament Reading: Proverbs 12:23-13:9
A prudent man conceals his knowledge, but fools proclaim their folly.
The hand of the diligent will rule, while the slothful will be put to forced labor.
Anxiety in a man’s heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad. A righteous man turns away from evil, but the way of the wicked leads them astray. A slothful man will not catch his prey, but the diligent man will get precious wealth. In the path of righteousness is life, but the way of error leads to death. A wise son hears his father’s instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.
From the fruit of his mouth a good man eats good, but the desire of the treacherous is for violence. He who guards his mouth preserves his life; he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.
The soul of the sluggard craves, and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied.
A righteous man hates falsehood, but a wicked man acts shamefully and disgracefully.
Righteousness guards him whose way is upright, but sin overthrows the wicked.
One man pretends to be rich, yet has nothing; another pretends to be poor, yet has great wealth. The ransom of a man’s life is his wealth, but a poor man has no means of redemption.
The light of the righteous rejoices, but the lamp of the wicked will be put out.

Day 23-Mar-2023 Thursday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Monk-martyr Nikon and 199 disciples, in Sicily (251)

He was born in Neapolis (Naples) to a pagan father and a Christian mother, and became an officer in the Roman army. Though he was not baptised, his mother had secretly instructed him in the Christian faith. Once, in a battle, his company was completely surrounded by the enemy, and Nikon recalled his mother's counseling that, whenever he was in trouble, he should make the sign of the Cross and call upon Christ. This he did, and was immediately filled with strength and resolution, so that the enemy's army was routed. Nikon went home, openly crying out 'Great is the God of the Christians!' to the great joy of his mother.

He traveled secretly to Cyzicus in Asia, where the bishop Theodosius baptised him. He then entered a monastery to spend his days in prayer and study. But some years later Theodosius, who was near death, had a vision in which he was told to consecrate Nikon as his successor. He summoned Nikon from the monastery and, to the monk's amazement, immediately ordained him a deacon, then a priest, then a bishop.

Later, bishop Nikon returned to Italy to preach the Gospel of Christ. In Naples, he found his mother still alive, and remained with her until her death. He then set out with nine disciples, former fellow-soldiers, to proclaim the Faith. Through the Saint's grace-filled preaching and example, many more disciples were soon added to this number. At that time a great persecution of Christians was underway, and Quintinianus, ruler of that region, seized Nikon and his companions and handed them over to the torturers. One hundred ninety of Nikon's companions perished under torture. Nikon himself was beaten, flayed, and even thrown from a high cliff, but was miraculously preserved. Finally he was slain by the sword and his body thrown in a field to be eaten by the beasts. A shepherd boy, possessed by a spirit of madness, found the body, fell on it, and was instantly healed. He told his story to some Christians, who found the body and gave it honorable burial. Saint Nikon contested during the reign of the Emperor Decius.

Venerable Nicon of the Kiev Caves
Luke the New Martyr of Mytilene
Venerable Pachomius of Nerekhta
Venerable Basil of Mangazea

Day 23-Mar-2023 Thursday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Isaiah 28:14-22; Genesis 10:32-11:9; Proverbs 13:20-14:6

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 28:14-22
Thus says the LORD, you scoffers, who rule this people in Jerusalem! Because you have said, 'We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we have an agreement; when the overwhelming scourge passes through it will not come to us; for we have made lies our refuge, and in falsehood we have taken shelter';
therefore thus says the Lord GOD, 'Behold, I am laying in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: ‘He who believes will not be in haste.
’ And I will make justice the line, and righteousness the plummet; and hail will sweep away the refuge of lies, and waters will overwhelm the shelter.
Then your covenant with death will be annulled, and your agreement with Sheol will not stand; when the overwhelming scourge passes through you will be beaten down by it.
As often as it passes through it will take you; for morning by morning it will pass through, by day and by night; and it will be sheer terror to understand the message.
For the bed is too short to stretch oneself on it, and the covering too narrow to wrap oneself in it.
For the LORD will rise up as on Mount Perazim, he will be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon; to do his deed – strange is his deed! and to work his work – alien is his work! Now therefore do not scoff, lest your bonds be made strong; for I have heard a decree of destruction from the Lord GOD of hosts upon the whole land.

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 10:32-11:9
These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, in their nations; and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood.
Now the whole earth had one language and few words.
And as men migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.
And they said to one another, 'Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.
And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar.
Then they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon

the face of the whole earth.
And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the sons of men had built.
And the LORD said, 'Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.
Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.
So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.
Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

Old Testament Reading: Proverbs 13:19-14:6
A desire fulfilled is sweet to the soul; but to turn away from evil is an abomination to fools.
He who walks with wise men becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.
Misfortune pursues sinners, but prosperity rewards the righteous.
A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, but the sinner's wealth is laid up for the righteous.
The fallow ground of the poor yields much food, but it is swept away through injustice.
He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.
The righteous has enough to satisfy his appetite, but the belly of the wicked suffers want.
Wisdom builds her house, but folly with her own hands tears it down.
He who walks in uprightness fears the LORD, but he who is devious in his ways despises him.
The talk of a fool is a rod for his back, but the lips of the wise will preserve them.
Where there are no oxen, there is no grain; but abundant crops come by the strength of the ox.
A faithful witness does not lie, but a false witness breathes out lies.
A scoffer seeks wisdom in vain, but knowledge is easy for a man of understanding.

Day 24-Mar-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Forefeast of the Annunciation

Saint Zacharias the Recluse of Egypt (4th c.)

His father, Carion the Egyptian, forsook his family to become a monk, taking Zacharias with him. Though very young, Zacharias manifested gifts of grace rarely seen among the elders of Sketis. Abba Moses once asked him, 'What does it mean to be a monk?', to which Zacharias replied by taking off his hat and treading it underfoot, saying 'If a man be not so broken, he cannot be a monk.' After shining as a great light among the holy monks of Scetis, he reposed at a young age.

Commemoration of the Miracle at the Monastery of the Caves in Kiev (?)

"Two friends, John and Sergius, swore brotherhood before the icon of the holy Mother of God in this monastery. John was a rich man, with a five-year-old son, Zachariah. John fell ill, and at his death commended his son to the care of Sergius, and left in Sergius' keeping a large sum of silver and gold for him to hand over to Zachariah when he had grown up. When Zachariah came of age, however, Sergius denied receiving anything from the deceased John. Then Zachariah said: 'Let him swear before the same icon of the most holy Mother of God, in front of which he accepted brotherhood with my late father, that he received nothing from John, and then I will seek nothing more from him.' Sergius agreed, but when he had sworn this and went up to kiss the icon, some force held him back and would not allow him to come near. Then, tormented all at once by a demon, he began to cry out: 'Holy fathers Antony and Theodosius, do not let this merciless angel destroy me!' The demon had attacked him by God's permission. He then told them of all the money which John had left. But when they opened the box, they found double the amount. Taking it, Zachariah gave it to the monastery and was himself tonsured as a monk. He lived a long time and was worthy of God's great gifts, entering peacefully into eternity." (Prologue)

Saint Artemon, Bishop of Seleucia

Hieromartyr Parthenius, Patriarch of Constantinople

Day 24-Mar-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Isaiah 29:13-23; Genesis 12:1-7; Proverbs 14:15-26

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 29:13-23
And the Lord said: 'Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment of men learned by rote; therefore, behold, I will again do marvelous things with this people, wonderful and marvelous; and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hid.
Woe to those who hide deep from the LORD their counsel, whose deeds are in the dark, and who say, 'Who sees us? Who knows us?' You turn things upside down! Shall the potter be regarded as the clay; that the thing made should say of its maker, 'He did not make me'; or the thing formed say of him who formed it, 'He has no understanding'? Is it not yet a very little while until Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be regarded as a forest? In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see.
The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD, and the poor among men shall exult in the Holy One of Israel.
For the ruthless shall come to nought and the scoffer cease, and all who watch to do evil shall be cut off, who by a word make a man out to be an offender, and lay a snare for him who reproves in the gate, and with an empty plea turn aside him who is in the right.
Therefore thus says the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob: 'Jacob shall no more be ashamed, no more shall his face grow pale.
For when he sees his children, the work of my hands, in his midst, they will sanctify my name; they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and will stand in awe of the God of Israel.

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 12:1-7
Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.
And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves.

So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him.
Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.
And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother’s son, and all their possessions which they had gathered, and the persons that they had gotten in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan.
When they had come to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh.
At that time the Canaanites were in the land.
Then the LORD appeared to Abram, and said, 'To your descendants I will give this land.
So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

Old Testament Reading: Proverbs 14:15-26
The simple believes everything, but the prudent looks where he is going.
A wise man is cautious and turns away from evil, but a fool throws off restraint and is careless.
A man of quick temper acts foolishly, but a man of discretion is patient.
The simple acquire folly, but the prudent are crowned with knowledge.
The evil bow down before the good, the wicked at the gates of the righteous.
The poor is disliked even by his neighbor, but the rich has many friends.
He who despises his neighbor is a sinner, but happy is he who is kind to the poor.
Do they not err that devise evil? Those who devise good meet loyalty and faithfulness.
In all toil there is profit, but mere talk tends only to want.
The crown of the wise is their wisdom, but folly is the garland of fools.
A truthful witness saves lives, but one who utters lies is a betrayer.
In the fear of the LORD one has strong confidence, and his children will have a refuge.

Day 25-Mar-2023 Saturday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

The Annunciation of Our Most Holy Lady, the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary

When Mary the Virgin was about fourteen years old, the Archangel Gabriel came to Joseph's dwelling, where she was living, and said to her, 'Rejoice, thou Full of Grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.' Receiving assurance that she had been chosen to be the Mother of God Himself, she answered in humility, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.' Immediately, the Holy Spirit came upon her, the power of the Most High overshadowed her, and the Incarnation, long awaited by the whole creation, took place: He who contains the whole universe consented to be contained in the womb of one woman, the most holy Theotokos.

The Church teaches us that it was within the holy Virgin's power to refuse the divine conception: her knowing and willing acceptance, the consummation of the faith of the whole righteous remnant of Israel, shows us that our very salvation is the fruit of the cooperation (synergia) of human faithfulness with God's saving grace.

Carrying in her womb the Savior of the Universe, the Virgin went to the hills of Judea to stay with her kinswoman Elizabeth, who six months before had conceived in her old age (by Zacharias the priest) St John the Forerunner. As the holy Virgin approached, the child John leaped in his mother's womb for joy, prophesying the coming of Emmanuel. Feeling the prophecy, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and blessed the holy Mary and the fruit of her womb. And Mary in turn glorified God, saying 'My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior' (Luke ch. 1).

Epistle Reading: St. Paul's Letter to the Hebrews 2:11-18

BRETHREN, he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, 'I will proclaim thy name to my brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee.' And again, 'I will put my trust in him.' And again, 'Here am I, and the children God has given me. Since therefore the children share in flesh and

blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage. For surely it is not with angels that he is concerned but with the descendants of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.

Gospel Reading: Luke 1:24-38
In those days, Elizabeth the wife of Zacharias conceived and for five months she hid herself, saying, 'Thus the Lord had done to me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men.' In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you! Blessed are you among women!' But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end.' And Mary said to the angel, 'How shall this be, since I have no husband?' And the angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible.' And Mary said, 'Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.' And the angel departed from her.

<u>Apolytikion</u>

Today marks the crowning of our salvation and the revelation of the mystery before all ages. For the Son of God becomes the son of the Virgin, and Gabriel proclaims the grace. Wherefore, we also cry out with him, “Hail, O full of grace, the Lord is with you.”

<u>Kontakion</u>

To you, Theotokos, invincible Defender, having been delivered from peril, I, your city, dedicate the victory festival as a thank offering. In your irresistible might, keep me safe from all trials, that I may call out to you: “Hail, unwedded bride!”

New Confessor/Hieromartyr Tikhon, patriarch of Moscow (1925)

Born in 1865, he was tonsured a monk in 1891, and consecrated a Bishop in 1891. From 1900, he was Bishop of Alaska, with oversight of the Church throughout North America. In America, he consecrated the first Orthodox monastery on the continent and worked tirelessly to unite all ethnic groups as one flock. In 1907 he was made Bishop of Yaroslavl and returned to Russia.

In 1917, he was elected to be the first Patriarch of Moscow since the abolition of the Patriarchate by Tsar Peter the Great more than 200 years before. Almost immediately, the Russian Church was plunged into new and terrible persecution as an atheist and totalitarian government seized control. Patriarch Tikhon always sought not to quarrel with the Communist government, but his refusal to deny his faith or his Church marked him in their eyes as an enemy. In 1925 he died under mysterious circumstances, and is generally thought to have been murdered by the Soviets. He is commemorated as a Confessor, and by many as a Martyr also.

Note: because his commemoration falls on the Feast of the Annunciation, his service is usually transferred to the day before or after the Feast.

St Justin (Popovich) of Cheliye in Serbia (1979)

Holy Martyrs Pelagia, Theodosia and Dula

Sermon on the Annunciation by St Proklos, Patriarch of Constantinople

Our present gathering in honor of the Most Holy Virgin inspires me, brethren, to say of Her a word of praise, of benefit also for those come unto this churchly solemnity.

It comprises a praise of women, a glorying of their gender, which (glory) is brought it by Her, She Who is at one same time both Mother, and Virgin. O desired and wondrous gathering! Celebrate, O nature, that wherein honor be rendered to Woman; rejoice, O human race, that wherein the Virgin be glorified. "For when sin did abound, grace did superabound" (Rom 5:20).

The Holy Mother of God and Virgin Mary hath gathered us here, She the pure treasure of virginity, the intended paradise of Second Adam -- the locus, wherein was accomplished the co-uniting of natures, wherein was affirmed the Counsel of salvific reconciliation.

Whoever is it that ever saw, whoever heard, that within a womb the Limitless God would make habitation, Whom the Heavens cannot circumscribe, Whom the womb

of a Virgin limiteth not!?
He born of woman is not only God and He is not only Man: This One born made woman, being the ancient gateway of sin, into the gateway of salvation: where evil poured forth its poison, bringing on disobedience, there the Word made for Himself a living temple, bringing in thither obedience; from whence the arch-sinner Cain sprang forth, there without seed was born Christ the Redeemer of the human race.

The Lover-of-Mankind did not disdain to be born of woman, since this bestowed His life. He was not subject to impurity, being settled within the womb, which He Himself arrayed free from all harm.
If perchance this Mother did not remain a Virgin, then that born of Her might be a mere man, and the birth would be no wise miraculous; but since she after birth remained a Virgin, then how is He Who is born indeed -- not God? It is an inexplicable mystery, since in an inexplicable manner was born He Who without hindrance went through doors when they were locked. When confessing in Him the co-uniting of two natures, Thomas cried out: "My Lord, and my God!" (Jn 20:28).

The Apostle Paul says, that Christ is "to the Jews indeed scandal, and to the Gentiles yet folly" (1 Cor 1:23): they did not perceive the power of the mystery, since it was incomprehensible to the mind: "for had they understood, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory" (1 Cor 2:8).
If the Word had not settled within the womb, then the flesh would not have ascended with Him onto the Divine Throne; if for God it were disdainful to enter into the womb, which He created, then the Angels too would have disdained service to mankind.

That One, Who by His nature was not subject to sufferings, through His love for us subjected Himself to many a suffering. We believe, that Christ not through some gradual ascent towards the Divine nature was made God, but being God, through His mercy He was made Man. We do not say: "a man made God"; but we confess, that God was incarnated and made Man.

His Servant was chosen for Himself as Mother by That One Who, in His essence did not have mother, and Who, through Divine foresight having appeared upon the earth in the image of man, does not have here father.
How one and the same is He both without father, and without mother, in accord with the words of the Apostle (Heb 7:3)? If He -- be only a man, then He cannot be without mother -- but actually He had a Mother. If He -- be God only, then He cannot be without Father -- but in fact He has the Father. And yet as God the Creator He has not mother, and as Man He has not father.

We can be persuaded in this by the very name of the Archangel, making

annunciation to Mary: his name -- is Gabriel. What does this name mean? -- it means: "God and man." Since That One about Whom he announced is God and Man, then his very name points beforehand to this miracle, so that with faith be accepted the deed of the Divine dispensation.

To save people would be impossible for a mere man, since every man has need in the Saviour: "for all, -- says Saint Paul, -- have sinned, and come short the Glory of God" (Rom 3:23).
Since sin subjects the sinner to the power of the devil, and the devil subjects him to death, then our condition did become extremely hapless: there was no sort of way to be delivered from death.

There were sent physicians, i.e. the prophets, but they could only the more clearly point out the malady. What did they do? When they saw, that the illness was beyond human skill, they summoned from Heaven the Physician; one of them said "Lord, bend the heavens, and come down" (Ps 143[144]:5); others cried out: "Heal me, O Lord, and I shalt be healed" (Jer 17:14); "restore Thine power, and come yet to save us" (Ps 79[80]:3). And yet others: "For if God truly be settled with man upon the earth" (3[1] Kg 8:27); "speedily send before Thine tender mercy, O Lord, for we are brought very low" (Ps 78[79]:8).

Others said: "O woe to me, my soul! For the pious art perished from the earth, and of the upright amongst men there is none" (Mich 7:2). "O God, in help attend to me, O Lord, shield me with Thine help" (Ps 69[70]:1).
"If there be delay, endure it, for He that cometh shalt come, and not tarry" (Hab 2:3). "Perishing like a lost sheep: seek out Thine servant, who doth hope on Thee" (Ps 118[119]:176). "For God wilt come, our God, and wilt not keep silence" (Ps. 49[50]:3).

That One, Who by nature is Lord, did not disdain human nature, enslaved by the sinister power of the devil, the merciful God would not accede for it to be forever under the power of the devil, the Ever-Existing One came and gave in ransom His Blood; for the redemption of the race of man from death He gave up His Body, which He had accepted of the Virgin, He delivered the world from the curse of the law, annihilating death by His death. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law" -- exclaims Saint Paul (Gal 3:13).

Thus know, that our Redeemer is not simply a mere man, since all the human race was enslaved to sin. But He likewise is not God only, non-partaking of human nature. He had body, since if He had not clothed Himself in me,
He then likewise should not have saved me. But, having settled within the womb of the Virgin, He clothed Himself in my fate, and within this womb He perfected a miraculous change: He bestowed the Spirit and received a body, That One only

indeed (dwelling) with the Virgin and (born) of the Virgin. And so, Who is He, made manifest to us? The Prophet David doth point it out for thee in these words: "Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord" (Ps 117[118]:26).

But tell us even more clearly, O prophet, Who is He? The Lord is the God of Hosts, says the prophet: "God is the Lord, and hath revealed Himself unto us" (Ps 117[118]:27). "The Word was made flesh" (Jn 1:14): there were co-united the two natures, and the union remained without mingling.

He came to save, but had also to suffer. What has the one in common with the other? A mere man cannot save; and God in only His nature cannot suffer. By what means was done the one and the other? Wherein that He, Emmanuel, being God, was made also Man; both this, that what He was, He saved by -- and this, that what He was made, He suffered as. Wherefore, when the Church beheld that the Jewish throng had crowned Him with thorns, bewailing the violence of the throng, it said: "Daughters of Zion, go forth and behold the crown, of which is crowned He of His mother" (Sng 3:11).

He wore the crown of thorns and destroyed the judgement to suffering from the thorns. He Only is That One both in the bosom of the Father and in the womb of the Virgin; He Only is That One -- in the arms of His Mother and in the wings of the winds (Ps. 103[104]:3); He, to Whom the Angels bowed down in worship, at that same time reclined at table with publicans.

Upon Him the Seraphim dared not to gaze, and at the same time Pilate pronounced sentence upon Him. He is That One and Same, Whom the servant did smite and before whom did tremble all creation.

He was nailed to the Cross and ascended to the Throne of Glory -- He was placed in the tomb and He stretched out the heavens like a skin (Ps. 103[104]:2) -- He was numbered amidst the dead and He emptied hell; here upon the earth, they cursed at Him as a transgressor -- there in Heaven, they exclaimed Him glory as the All-Holy.

What an incomprehensible mystery! I see the miracles, and I confess, that He is God; I see the sufferings, and I cannot deny, that He is Man. Emmanuel opened up the doors of nature, as man, and preserved unharmed the seal of virginity, as God: He emerged from the womb thus as He entered through the announcing; the same wondrously was He both born and conceived: without passion He entered, and without impairment He emerged, as concerning this doth say the Prophet Ezekiel: "He returned me back the way of the gates of the outer sanctuaries, looking upon the east: and these had been shut. And saith the Lord to me: son of man, these gates shalt be closed, and not open, and no one go through them: for the Lord

God of Israel, He Only, shalt enter and come forth, and they wilt be shut" (Ez 44:1-2). Here it clearly indicates the Holy Virgin and Mother of God Mary.

Let cease all contention, and let the Holy Scripture enlighten our reason, so that we too receive the Heavenly Kingdom unto all eternity. Amen.

Day 25-Mar-2023 Saturday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.
Readings of the day: Hebrews 6:9-12; Mark 7:31-37
Epistle Reading: St.
Paul's Letter to the Hebrews 6:9-12
BRETHREN, we feel sure of better things that belong to salvation.
For God is not so unjust as to overlook your work and the love which you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do.
And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness in realizing the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Gospel Reading: Mark 7:31-37
At that time, Jesus returned from the region of Tyre, and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, through the region of Dekapolis.
And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech; and they besought him to lay his hand upon him.
And taking him aside from the multitude privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven, he sighed, and said to him, 'Ephphatha,' that is, 'Be opened.
And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.
And he charged them to tell no one; but the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it.
And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, 'He has done all things well: he even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak.

Day 26-Mar-2023 Sunday

Fast Day ; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Synaxis of the Archangel Gabriel

Each of the Great Feasts of the Church is followed by a commemoration of some holy one who figures in the events of the Feast. So, today we commemorate the Holy Archangel Gabriel, who brought the glad news of the conception of Christ to Mary, the Theotokos. The Prologue gives the following teaching:

"The herald of the incarnation of the Son of God, he is one of the seven great angels who stand before the throne of God. He revealed to Zacharias the birth of the Forerunner, and said of himself: 'I am Gabriel that stand in the presence of God' (Lk. 1:19). His name, Gabriel, signifies 'man of God'. Speaking about the Annunciation, the holy Fathers comment that an angel with such a name was sent to signify who He was, and of what nature He was, who would be born of the most pure Virgin. He would be the Man of God, the Man-God, the strong and mighty God. Others have found that it was this same Gabriel who announced the conception of the Virgin Mary to Joachim and Anna, and that it was he who taught Moses in the wilderness to write the Book of Genesis. The holy Fathers consider that Gabriel belongs to the foremost and highest order of the heavenly powers, the seraphim, since the seraphim stand closest to God. And so he is one of the seven seraphim closest to God. The names of these seven are: Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel, Selathiel, Jegudiel and Barachiel. Some would add Jeremiel to this number. Each has his own particular service, but all are equal in honour. Why did God not send Michael? For the reason that Michael's service is the suppression of the enemies of God's truth, while Gabriel's is the annunciation of the salvation of the human race."

26 Martyrs of the Goths
Venerable Basil the Younger
Venerable Abraham of Mount Latros

Day 26-Mar-2023 Sunday

Fast Day ; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Gospel Reading: 4th Sunday of Lent – St. John Climacus
Hebrews 6:13-20; Mark 9:17-31
Epistle Reading: St.
Paul's Letter to the Hebrews 6:13-20 BRETHREN, when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore to himself, saying, 'Surely I will bless you and multiply you.
And thus Abraham, having patiently endured, obtained the promise.
Men indeed swear by a greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation.
So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he interposed with an oath, so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God should prove false, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to seize the hope set before us.
We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.

Gospel Reading: 4th Sunday of Lent – St. John Climacus

At that time, a man came to Jesus kneeling and saying: 'Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a dumb spirit; and wherever it seizes him it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able.
And he answered them, 'O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me.
And they brought the boy to him; and when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth.
And Jesus asked his father, 'How long has he had this?' And he said, 'From childhood.
And it has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you can do anything, have pity on us and help us.
And Jesus said to him, 'If you can! All things are possible to him who believes.

Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, 'I believe; help my unbelief!' And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, 'You dumb and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again.
And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse; so that most of them said, 'He is dead.
But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.
And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, 'Why could we not cast it out?' And he said to them, 'This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer and fasting.
They went on from there and passed through Galilee.
And he would not have any one know it; for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, 'The Son of man will be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him; and when he is killed, after three days he will rise.

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING

St John of the Ladder, whose memory the Church honours today, tells us that ‘faith is the wing of prayer’, without which prayer falls back to earth and cannot fly out beyond us to God. And today’s Gospel extract is read at this time of Lent because of its reference to the need for prayer and fasting as a means of allowing the power of God to heal us.
We are therefore challenged to ask ourselves where we stand in the matter of faith as the basis of prayer and fasting.
Is our faith much stronger than that of the poor father of the sick boy who struggled between belief and unbelief? Do we pray with half our mind or with our whole heart? Do we believe with half of our heart and doubt with most of our mind? We see how the faith even of the apostles of Christ sometimes fell short, and Christ’s exclamation ‘O faithless generation!’ can apply to us all.

True faith is not a vague theoretical belief inferior to scientific proof, but a much more certain, spiritual knowledge which is deeper and higher than any reasoning, since rational understanding is limited to things perceptible to the senses or conceivable to the mind, whereas God is beyond all human understanding. Scientific knowledge, confined to the sphere of thinking, will always examine whether something is materially possible, and so it contains doubt.

But real faith in God, rooted in the humbled spiritual heart, is enabled by the grace of the Holy Spirit to soar above earthly limitations and search into hidden mysteries beyond; through strong faith, God comes to meet us and we understand things beyond understanding because we come to know that God, who created us and the universe from nothing, understands us more than we could ever understand ourself.

Thus, through simple faith and prayer, we are enabled to go beyond ourself in the complete surrender of trusting, fervent love of God, and to open ourself to spiritual enlightenment which is not of this world.

Modern secular society on the other hand, with its mind scattered and distracted in ever-increasing masses of worldly ‘data’ and ‘information’, departs from God and, from trying to create its own ‘truths’ begins to doubt the nature of truth itself, and in its fear of the unpredictable, enslaves itself to the impersonal mechanical ‘solutions’ of technology; but these do not heal the underlying misery and despair which come from sin and the fear of death.

Good and simple Christian faith sets us free by the assurance that the way, the truth and the life are Christ God Himself, against whom no destructive power can prevail. Our power of reasoning comes from God, but when we use it with pride and unbelief, it is corrupted and becomes demonic; as St Paisios of the Holy Mountain said, ‘logic full of egoism is logic that harbours demons’.

And so the predicament of the demonised child and the unbelieving father in today’s Gospel speaks to our age, where secular rationalism seeks to replace belief in God, rejects divine Providence and denies the possibility of miracles. Faith, on the other hand, does not reject science or rational knowledge; rather it completes what is lacking, and through prayer and fasting, it transforms it into spiritual knowledge.

Strong faith does not come simply by an effort of the human mind, but is ultimately the gift and visitation of God Himself, and so we need to pray for increase of faith; when we thus humble ourselves, God can come, sanctifying what is merely human,

purifying and healing what is corrupted by the demons of pride, greed and selfishness, and raising it out of its own limitations into the life of God Himself, with whom everything is indeed possible for those who believe.

Fr Mark Mitchell

Day 27-Mar-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

St Matrona of Thessalonica (4th c.)

She was a servant of the Jewish wife of the governor of Thessalonica. When she refused to enter the synagogue with her mistress, she was beaten, then locked in a cell until she starved to death. Finally, her mistress ordered her body thrown from the roof of the house and left to lie in the open. Christians took her body and buried it honorably, and the bishop, Alexander, built a church over her grave.

Saint Paul, Bishop of Corinth

Venerable John of Lycopolis

Day 27-Mar-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Isaiah 37:33-38:6; Genesis 13:12-18; Proverbs 14:27-15:4

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 37:33-38:6 'Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria: He shall not come into this city, or shoot an arrow there, or come before it with a shield, or cast up a siege mound against it.
By the way that he came, by the same he shall return, and he shall not come into this city, says the LORD.
For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David.
And the angel of the LORD went forth, and slew a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians; and when men arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies.
Then Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went home and dwelt at Nineveh.
And as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, Adrammelech and Sharezer, his sons, slew him with the sword, and escaped into the land of Ararat.
And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his stead.
In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death.
And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him, and said to him, 'Thus says the LORD: Set your house in order; for you shall die, you shall not recover.
Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall, and prayed to the LORD, and said, 'Remember now, O LORD, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in thy sight.
And Hezekiah wept bitterly.
Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah: 'Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will add fifteen years to your life.
I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and defend this city.

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 13:12-18 Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, while Lot dwelt among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom.
Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the LORD.
The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, 'Lift up your eyes, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see I will give to you and to your descendants for ever.

I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your descendants also can be counted.
Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you.
So Abram moved his tent, and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron; and there he built an altar to the LORD.

Old Testament Reading: Proverbs 14:27-15:4 The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, that one may avoid the snares of death.
In a multitude of people is the glory of a king, but without people a prince is ruined.
He who is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.
A tranquil mind gives life to the flesh, but passion makes the bones rot.
He who oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is kind to the needy honors him.
The wicked is overthrown through his evil-doing, but the righteous finds refuge through his integrity.
Wisdom abides in the mind of a man of understanding, but it is not known in the heart of fools.
Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.
A servant who deals wisely has the king’s favor, but his wrath falls on one who acts shamefully.
A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.
The tongue of the wise dispenses knowledge, but the mouths of fools pour out folly.
The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.
A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.

Day 28-Mar-2023 Tuesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Blessed Nicholas of Pskov, fool for Christ (1576)

"A rare fearlessness is a characteristic of fools for Christ. Blessed Nicholas ran through the streets of Pskov, pretending madness, rebuking people for their secret sins and foretelling what would happen to them. When Tsar Ivan the Terrible entered Pskov, the whole town was in fear and dread of the terrible Tsar... The Tsar, learning about this blessed man, who and what he was, visited him in his tiny room. [Ivan was a great lover of external piety.] It was the first week of the Great Fast. Hearing that the Tsar was coming to visit him, Nicholas found a piece of raw meat and, when the Tsar entered his cell, Nicholas bowed and offered the meat to the Tsar. 'Eat, little Ivan, eat!' The terrible Tsar answered him furiously: 'I am a Christian, and do not eat meat in the Fast.' Then the man of God retorted, 'You do that and worse; you feed on men's flesh and blood, forgetting not only the Fast but God as well.' This lecture entered deeply into the heart of Tsar Ivan, and he immediately left Pskov in shame, having intended to wreak great slaughter there." (Prologue)

Holy New Martyr Kyranna (1751)

This pious and beautiful maiden lived in a village near Thessalonica. One day a Janissary, come to collect taxes, laid eyes on her and was struck by lust. When she refused his advances, the wicked official brought her before the judge in Thessalonica and, using other soldiers as false witnesses, said that she had agreed to marry him and to convert to Islam. To all these claims Kyranna replied, 'I am a Christian, and I have no bridegroom but Christ, to whom I have offered my maidenhood as a dowry. Him I love and for Him I am ready to shed my blood! That is my answer; expect no other from me.' Having said this, she 'enclosed herself in silence' (Synaxarion) and would testify no more. She was cast into prison, where she was tormented and finally beaten to death by her jailer. When she died, a divine Light surrounded her and illumined the entire prison. When news of the miracle spread, the shamed Turkish officials handed over her body to Christians, who laid it to rest outside the city.

Venerable Hilarion the New Confessor

Father Hesychius of Jerusalem

Holy Martyr Eustratius the Faster of the Kiev Caves

Holy Martyr Boyan, Bulgarian Prince

Day 28-Mar-2023 Tuesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Isaiah 40:18-31; Genesis 15:1-15; Proverbs 15:7-19

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 40:18-31 Thus says the LORD: To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him? The idol! a workman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold, and casts for it silver chains.
He who is impoverished chooses for an offering wood that will not rot; he seeks out a skilful craftsman to set up an image that will not move.
Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; who brings princes to nought, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing.
Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows upon them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble.
To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? Says the Holy One.
Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power not one is missing.
Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, 'My way is hid from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God'? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary, his understanding is unsearchable.
He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength.
Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 15:1-15 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, 'Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.
But Abram said, 'O Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?' And Abram said, 'Behold, thou hast given me no offspring; and a slave born in my house will be my heir.
And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, 'This man shall not be your heir; your own son shall be your heir.

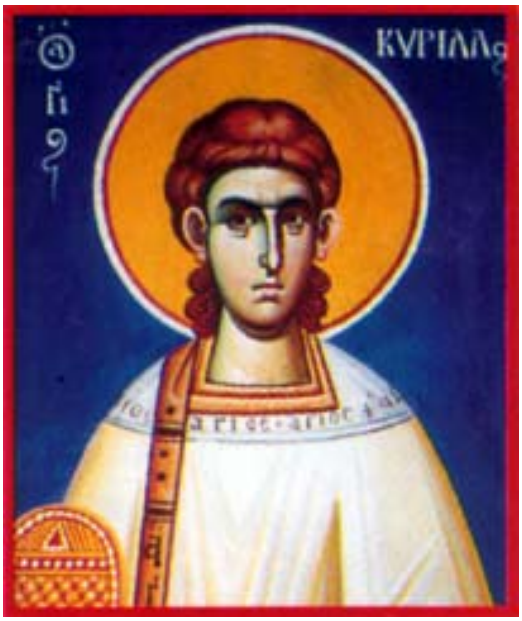
And he brought him outside and said, 'Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.
Then he said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.
And he believed the LORD; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness.
And he said to him, 'I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess.
But he said, 'O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?' He said to him, 'Bring me a heifer three years old, a she-goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.
And he brought him all these, cut them in two, and laid each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two.
And when birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away.
As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram; and lo, a dread and great darkness fell upon him.
Then the LORD said to Abram, 'Know of a surety that your descendants will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and will be slaves there, and they will be oppressed for four hundred years; but I will bring judgment on the nation which they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.
As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age.

Old Testament Reading: Proverbs 15:7-19 The lips of the wise spread knowledge; not so the minds of fools.
The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is his delight.
The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but he loves him who pursues righteousness.
There is severe discipline for him who forsakes the way; he who hates reproof will die.
Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the LORD, how much more the hearts of men!
A scoffer does not like to be reproved; he will not go to the wise.
A glad heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of heart the spirit is broken.
The mind of him who has understanding seeks knowledge, but the mouths of fools feed on folly.
All the days of the afflicted are evil, but a cheerful heart has a continual feast.
Better is a little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble with it.
Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fatted ox and hatred with it.
A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention.
The way of a sluggard is overgrown with thorns, but the path of the upright is a level highway.

Day 29-Mar-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Our Righteous Father Mark the Confessor, Bishop of Arethusa; Cyril the Deacon, and others martyred during the reign of Julian



"Saint Mark was Bishop of Arethusa in Syria. In the days of Saint Constantine the Great, Saint Mark, moved with divine zeal, destroyed a temple of the idols and raised up a church in its stead. When Julian the Apostate reigned, in 361, as the pagans were now able to avenge the destruction of their temple, Saint Mark, giving way to wrath, hid himself; but when he saw that others were being taken on his account, he gave himself up. Having no regard to his old age, they stripped him and beat his whole body, cast him into filthy sewers, and pulling him out, had children prick him with their iron writing-pens. Then they put him into a basket, smeared him with honey and a kind of relish of pickled fish, and hung him up under the burning sun to be devoured by bees and wasps. But because he bore this so nobly, his enemies repented, and unloosed him.

"Saint Cyril was a deacon from Heliopolis in Phoenecia. During the reign of the Emperor Constantius, son of Saint Constantine, he had also broken the idols in pieces. When Julian came to power, Saint Cyril was seized by the idolators and his belly was ripped open. The other holy Martyrs celebrated today, martyred in Gaza and Ascalon during the reign of Julian, were men of priestly rank and consecrated virgins; they were disemboweled, filled with barley, and set before swine to be eaten. The account of all the above Saints is given in Book III, ch. 3, of Theodoret of Cyrrhus' Ecclesiastical History. (Great Horologion)

Our Holy Father John the Hermit (4th c.)

"He was the son of Juliana, a Christian woman of Armenia. While still a child, he left his mother and ran off to the desert. He was utterly aflame with love for Christ the Lord. In the beginning he entrusted himself to the guidance of a spiritual father, Pharmutius, who was so pleasing to God that an angel brought him bread every day. John later left him and withdrew into solitude. He let himself down into a dry well and lived there for a full ten years in fasting,

prayer and vigils. St Pharmutius used to bring him some of the angel's bread, for the angel of God did not wish to bring bread to the young John in person, lest he grow proud through this, so sent it through Pharmutius his spiritual father. After ten years of arduous asceticism in his well, St John went to the Lord and his relics revealed wonderworking power. He lived and was glorified by God and men in the 4th century." (Prologue)

Saint Diadochus the God-bearer
Eustathios, Bishop of Kios in Bithynia
Holy Martyrs Jonas and Barachesius

Day 29-Mar-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Isaiah 41:4-14; Genesis 17:1-9; Proverbs 15:20-16:9

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 41:4-14 Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am He.
The coastlands have seen and are afraid, the ends of the earth tremble; they have drawn near and come.
Every one helps his neighbor, and says to his brother, 'Take courage!' The craftsman encourages the goldsmith, and he who smoothes with the hammer him who strikes the anvil, saying of the soldering, 'It is good'; and they fasten it with nails so that it cannot be moved.
But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, 'You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off'; fear not, for I am with you, be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.
Behold, all who are incensed against you shall be put to shame and confounded; those who strive against you shall be as nothing and shall perish.
You shall seek those who contend with you, but you shall not find them; those who war against you shall be as nothing at all.
For I, the LORD your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, 'Fear not, I will help you.
Fear not, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel! I will help you, says the LORD; your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel.

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 17:1-9 When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless.
And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.
Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, 'Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations.
No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.
I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you.

And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you.
And I will give to you, and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.

Old Testament Reading: Proverbs 15:20-16:9 A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish man despises his mother.
Folly is a joy to him who has no sense, but a man of understanding walks aright.
Without counsel plans go wrong, but with many advisers they succeed.
To make an apt answer is a joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is!
The wise man's path leads upward to life, that he may avoid Sheol beneath.
The LORD tears down the house of the proud, but maintains the widow's boundaries.
The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the LORD, the words of the pure are pleasing to him.
He who is greedy for unjust gain makes trouble for his household, but he who hates bribes will live.
The mind of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.
The LORD is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous.
The light of the eyes rejoices the heart, and good news refreshes the bones.
He whose ear heeds wholesome admonition will abide among the wise.
He who ignores instruction despises himself, but he who heeds admonition gains understanding.
The fear of the LORD is instruction in wisdom, and humility goes before honor.
The plans of the mind belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.
All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the spirit.
Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established.
The LORD has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble.
Every one who is arrogant is an abomination to the LORD; be assured, he will not go unpunished.
By loyalty and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the LORD a man avoids evil.
When a man's ways please the LORD, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.
Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues with injustice.
A man's mind plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps.

Day 30-Mar-2023 Thursday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

St John Klimakos (John of the Ladder) of Sinai (649)

He is best known as the author of the Ladder of Divine Ascent, a treasury of spiritual wisdom which is read in its entirety in monasteries during every Lenten season. He is also commemorated on the Fourth Sunday of Great Lent.

Nothing is known of his life before he entered the monastery at Mount Sinai (now St Katherine's Monastery) at the age of sixteen; he remained there until his death at the age of eighty. After he first arrived, he spent nineteen years in strict obedience to his spiritual father, Martyrios. When Martyrios died, John retired to a nearby cave, where he lived in the strictest asceticism for twenty years. (It was during these years that he wrote the Ladder.) He reluctantly returned to the monastery when he was made abbot by the brethren, and spent the rest of his days guiding his spiritual children in the way of salvation.

Once he heard a monk criticize him for speaking too much; rather than reproach the monk, he himself kept silence for a full year, never uttering a word until the brethren begged him to speak again. At another time a large company of pilgrims came to Mt Sinai. At supper they all saw a young man, dressed as a Jew, serving at table and giving orders to the other servants, then suddenly disappearing. When they wondered among themselves what this could mean, John said 'Do not try to look for him; that was the prophet Moses serving you in his own home.'

When the holy abbot knew that his death was approaching, he appointed his own brother, George, as his successor. George grieved the approaching death of his beloved brother, but St John told him that, if he was found worthy to stand close to God after his death, he would pray that George be taken up to heaven in the same year. So it happened: ten months after St John's death, George reposed in the Lord.

Apolytikion

With the rivers of your tears, you have made the barren desert fertile. Through sighs of sorrow from deep within you, your labors have borne fruit a hundred-

fold. By your miracles you have become a light, shining upon the world. O John, our Holy Father, pray to Christ our God, to save our souls.

Kontakion

As ever-blooming fruits, thou dost offer the teachings of thy God-given book, O wise John, thou most blessed, while sweet'ning the hearts of all them that heed it with vigilance; for it is a ladder from the earth unto Heaven that conferreth glory on the souls that ascend it and honour thee faithfully.

Commemoration of an Uncondemning Monk

"This monk died joyfully because he had never in his life condemned anyone. He was lazy, careless, disinclined to prayer, but throughout his entire life he had never judged anyone. And when he lay dying, he was full of joy. The brethren asked him how he could die so joyfully with all his sins, and he replied: 'I have just seen the angels, and they showed me a page with all my many sins. I said to them: "The Lord said: 'Judge not, that ye be not judged.' I have never judged anyone and I hope in the mercy of God, that He will not judge me." And the angels tore up the sheet of paper.' Hearing this, the monks wondered at it and learned from it." (From the Prologue)

Holy Prophet Joad
Zacharias the New Martyr, Bishop of Corinth
Venerable John of the Well
Sophronius, Bishop of Irkutsk

Day 30-Mar-2023 Thursday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Isaiah 42:5-16; Genesis 18:20-33; Proverbs 16:17-17:17

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 42:5-16 Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread forth the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it: 'I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.
I am the LORD, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to graven images.
Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them.
Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise from the end of the earth! Let the sea roar and all that fills it, the coastlands and their inhabitants.
Let the desert and its cities lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar inhabits; let the inhabitants of Sela sing for joy, let them shout from the top of the mountains.
Let them give glory to the LORD, and declare his praise in the coastlands.
The LORD goes forth like a mighty man, like a man of war he stirs up his fury; he cries out, he shouts aloud, he shows himself mighty against his foes.
For a long time I have held my peace, I have kept still and restrained myself; now I will cry out like a woman in travail, I will gasp and pant.
I will lay waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their herbage; I will turn the rivers into islands, and dry up the pools.
And I will lead the blind in a way that they know not, in paths that they have not known I will guide them.
I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground.
These are the things I will do, and I will not forsake them.

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 18:20-33 Then the LORD said, 'Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry which has come to me; and if not, I will know.
So the men turned from there, and went toward Sodom; but Abraham still stood before the LORD.
Then Abraham drew near, and said, 'Wilt thou indeed destroy the righteous with

the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; wilt thou then destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from thee to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from thee! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?'
And the LORD said, 'If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake.
Abraham answered, 'Behold, I have taken upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes.
Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking? Wilt thou destroy the whole city for lack of five?' And he said, 'I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.
Again he spoke to him, and said, 'Suppose forty are found there.
He answered, 'For the sake of forty I will not do it.
Then he said, 'Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak.
Suppose thirty are found there.
He answered, 'I will not do it, if I find thirty there.
He said, 'Behold, I have taken upon myself to speak to the Lord.
Suppose twenty are found there.
He answered, 'For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it.
Then he said, 'Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once.
Suppose ten are found there.
He answered, 'For the sake of ten I will not destroy it.
And the LORD went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.

Old Testament Reading: Proverbs 16:17-17:17 The highway of the upright turns aside from evil; he who guards his way preserves his life.
Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.
It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud.
He who gives heed to the word will prosper, and happy is he who trusts in the LORD.
The wise of heart is called a man of discernment, and pleasant speech increases persuasiveness.
Wisdom is a fountain of life to him who has it, but folly is the chastisement of fools.
The mind of the wise makes his speech judicious, and adds persuasiveness to his lips.
Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body.
There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.
A worker’s appetite works for him; his mouth urges him on.
A worthless man plots evil, and his speech is like a scorching fire.
A perverse man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends.
A man of violence entices his neighbor and leads him in a way that is not good.

He who winks his eyes plans perverse things, he who compresses his lips brings evil to pass.
A hoary head is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life.
He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.
The lot is cast into the lap, but the decision is wholly from the LORD.
Better is a dry morsel with quiet than a house full of feasting with strife.
A slave who deals wisely will rule over a son who acts shamefully, and will share the inheritance as one of the brothers.
The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and the LORD tries hearts.
An evildoer listens to wicked lips; and a liar gives heed to a mischievous tongue.
He who mocks the poor insults his Maker; he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished.
Grandchildren are the crown of the aged, and the glory of sons is their fathers.
Fine speech is not becoming to a fool; still less is false speech to a prince.
A bribe is like a magic stone in the eyes of him who gives it; wherever he turns he prospers.
He who forgives an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a matter alienates a friend.
A rebuke goes deeper into a man of understanding than a hundred blows into a fool.
An evil man seeks only rebellion, and a cruel messenger will be sent against him.
Let a man meet a she-bear robbed of her cubs, rather than a fool in his folly.
If a man returns evil for good, evil will not depart from his house.
The beginning of strife is like letting out water; so quit before the quarrel breaks out.
He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the LORD.
Why should a fool have a price in his hand to buy wisdom, when he has no mind?
A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

Day 31-Mar-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

St Innocent, enlightener of Alaska and Siberia (1879)

He was born in Siberia in 1797 to a clerical family, and became a married parish priest in Irkutsk. A devout explorer, John Kriukov, told him of the great spiritual needs among the Russian and native peoples in Alaska, then Russian territory. Moved to serve Christ in this very difficult environment, he and his family arrived in Alaska in 1824. He quickly learned the Aleut language and worked humbly and tirelessly among the Aleuts. His spiritual classic, An Indication of the Way to the Kingdom of Heaven, was originally written in Aleut and later translated into many languages.

While he was visiting Russia in 1838, his wife died; one year later he was tonsured a monk and given the name of Innocent (he had been Fr John Veniamov). Almost immediately after his tonsuring he was, without warning, raised to the rank of Bishop of all Eastern Siberia and Russian America, probably the largest diocese in the world at that time. Returning to Alaska, he continued his missionary work with vigor, often traveling among Aleut and Tlingit settlements in his own kayak. Wherever he went, he found the Alaskan people hungry for the faith, and his labors bore rich fruit which is still obvious today: Alaska has more Orthodox churches per capita than any other state.

In old age he was made Metropolitan of Moscow, head of the entire Russian Orthodox Church. His concern for Christian mission was undiminished, and as Metropolitan he created the Orthodox Missionary Society. He reposed on Holy Saturday of 1879.

Hieromartyr Hypatius, Bishop of Gangra (326)

He was born in Cilicia in Asia Minor, and became Bishop of Gangra, the capital of Paphlagonia. He took part in the First Ecumenical Council, where he was praised by all for his piety and miracles. It is said that the Emperor Constantius kept a bust of Hypatius in his palace as a weapon against demonic powers. The Saint was murdered by the Novatians, a sect which believed that there is no forgiveness for sins committed after Baptism. [The popularity of this belief helps to explain why many believers at that time postponed baptism until very late in life.] As Hypatius was traveling home from Constantinople, they attacked him on the road and stoned him to death. A woman who took part in the attack went mad and began to beat herself with a stone; she was only healed when her friends took her to the grave of St Hypatius and prayed for her. Restored by his compassionate intercession, she spent the rest of her life in repentance and prayer.

St Jonah, Metropolitan of Moscow (1461)
He became a monk at the age of twelve and lived in the Simonov Monastery near Moscow. He later became Bishop of Ryazan, then was chosen as Metropolitan of Moscow (at this time the Russian Church was still under the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and the Metropolitanate of Moscow was its highest office). But through some political intrigue, a man named Isidore became Metropolitan instead. It was this Isidore who attended the Council of Florence and voted for the infamous Union with Rome perpetrated there. When he returned to Moscow three years later he was condemned as an apostate and exiled. Bishop Jonah at last became Metropolitan in his place. In his lifetime he was widely known as a healer, wonder-worker, seer and spiritual father. In his last years he prayed to suffer greatly through some illness, so as to be purified by his sufferings. In answer to this prayer, he was given wounds in his feet, of which he died. His relics continued to perform many wonders. The Prologue recounts, "A dumb man, John, was brought to the saint's relics. John kissed Jonah's hand and, as he related afterwards, the hand grabbed hold of his tongue and he felt a sharp pain. When it let his tongue go, he went back to his friends — and spoke as if he had never been dumb."

Akakios the Confessor
Venerable Blasius of Amorium
Venerable Hypatius of the Kiev Caves

Day 31-Mar-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Isaiah 45:11-17; Genesis 22:1-18; Proverbs 17:17-18:5

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 45:11-17
Thus says the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker: 'Will you question me about my children, or command me concerning the work of my hands? I made the earth, and created man upon it; it was my hands that stretched out the heavens, and I commanded all their host.
I have aroused him in righteousness, and I will make straight all his ways; he shall build my city and set my exiles free, not for price or reward,' says the LORD of hosts.
Thus says the LORD: 'The wealth of Egypt and the merchandise of Ethiopia, and the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over to you and be yours, they shall follow you; they shall come over in chains and bow down to you.
They will make supplication to you, saying: ‘God is with you only, and there is no other, no god besides him.
' Truly, thou art a God who hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Savior.
All of them are put to shame and confounded, the makers of idols go in confusion together.
But Israel is saved by the LORD with everlasting salvation; you shall not be put to shame or confounded to all eternity.

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 22:1-18
After these things God tested Abraham, and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here am I.
He said, 'Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.
So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; and he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.
On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place afar off.
Then Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the ass; I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.
And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took in his hand the fire and the knife.
So they went both of them together.

And Isaac said to his father Abraham, 'My father! 'And he said, 'Here am I, my son.
He said, 'Behold, the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?'
Abraham said, 'God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.
So they went both of them together.
When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood.
Then Abraham put forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.
But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!' And he said, 'Here am I.
He said, 'Do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.
And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.
So Abraham called the name of that place The LORD will provide; as it is said to this day, 'On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.
And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, 'By myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore.
And your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.

Old Testament Reading: Proverbs 17:17-18:5 A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.
A man without sense gives a pledge, and becomes surety in the presence of his neighbor.
He who loves transgression loves strife; he who makes his door high seeks destruction.
A man of crooked mind does not prosper, and one with a perverse tongue falls into calamity.
A stupid son is a grief to a father; and the father of a fool has no joy.
A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones.
A wicked man accepts a bribe from the bosom to pervert the ways of justice.
A man of understanding sets his face toward wisdom, but the eyes of a fool are on the ends of the earth.
A foolish son is a grief to his father and bitterness to her who bore him.
To impose a fine on a righteous man is not good; to flog noble men is wrong.
He who restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.

Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent.
He who is estranged seeks pretexts to break out against all sound judgment.
A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.
When wickedness comes, contempt comes also; and with dishonor comes disgrace.
The words of a man’s mouth are deep waters; the fountain of wisdom is a gushing stream.
It is not good to be partial to a wicked man, or to deprive a righteous man of justice.

Day 01-Apr-2023 Saturday

Fast Day ; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Saint Mary of Egypt

The biography of this wonderful saint was written by St. Sophronius, the Patriarch of Jerusalem. Once, during Great Lent, a certain priest-monk, the Elder Zosimas, withdrew into the wilderness beyond the Jordan, a twenty-day trek. Suddenly, he caught sight of a human being with a withered and naked body, whose hair was as white as snow, and who fled from Zosimas's sight. The elder ran for a long while, until this person stopped at a brook and cried out: 'Abba Zosimas, forgive me for the sake of the Lord. I cannot face you, for I am a naked woman.' Zosimas then threw his outer garment to her, which she wrapped around herself, and then she showed herself to him. The elder was frightened upon hearing his name spoken from the mouth of this woman whom he did not know. Following his prolonged insistence, the woman related her life's story. She was born in Egypt, and at the age of twelve began to live a life of debauchery in Alexandria, where she spent seventeen years in this perverted way of life. Driven by the adulterous flame of the flesh, she one day boarded a boat which was sailing for Jerusalem. Arriving at the Holy City, she wanted to enter the church in order to venerate the Honorable Cross, but some invisible force restrained her, preventing her from entering the church. In great fear, she gazed upon the icon of the All-holy Mother of God in the narthex and prayed that she be allowed to enter the church to venerate the Honorable Cross, all the while confessing her sinfulness and uncleanness, and promising that she would go wherever the All-pure One would direct her. She was then permitted to enter the church. Having venerated the Cross, she went back to the narthex and, before the icon, gave thanks to the Mother of God. At that very moment she heard a voice saying: 'If you cross over Jordan you will find true peace!' Immediately she purchased three loaves of bread and started out for the Jordan, arriving there that same evening. The next day she received Holy Communion in the Monastery of St. John and crossed over the Jordan River. She remained in the wilderness for

forty-eight years in great torment and fear, struggling with passionate thoughts as though with wild beasts. She ate vegetation. After she finished her narrative, when she stood for prayer, Zosimas saw her levitate in the air. She begged him to bring her Holy Communion the following year on the shore of the Jordan, where she would then come to receive it. The following year Zosimas arrived with Holy Communion on the shore of the Jordan in the evening. He wondered how the saint would cross the Jordan. Then, in the light of the moon, he saw her approach the river, make the sign of the Cross over it and walk upon the water as though upon dry land. After Zosimas communed her, she begged him to come the following year to the same brook where they had first met. Zosimas came and discovered her lifeless body on that spot. Above her head in the sand was written: 'Abba Zosimas, bury the body of the humble Mary on this site; render dust to dust. I died on April 1, the same night of the saving suffering of Christ, after having received Communion of the Divine Mysteries.' From this inscription Zosimas first learned her name and the other and awesome miracle – that the previous year, when she received Holy Communion, she arrived that same night at this brook, which took him twenty days to reach. Thus, Zosimas buried the body of this wonderful saint, Mary of Egypt. When he returned to the monastery, Zosimas related the entire story of her life and the miracles which he had personally witnessed. Thus the Lord knows how to glorify penitent sinners. St. Mary is also commemorated on the Fifth Sunday of Great Lent. The Church holds her up as an example to the faithful during these days of the Fast as a model of repentance. She reposed in about the year 530.

From *The Prologue of Ohrid* by St. Nikolai Velimirovic

Apolytikion

The image of God, was faithfully preserved in you, O Mother. For you took up the Cross and followed Christ. By Your actions you taught us to look beyond the flesh for it passes, rather to be concerned about the soul which is immortal. Wherefore, O Holy Mary, your soul rejoices with the angels.

Kontakion

By the toils of thy struggles, O God-inspired one, thou didst hallow the harshness of the desert. Wherefore, we glorify thy memory, as we honour thee with hymns, O Mary, glory of the righteous.

Saint Melito, Bishop of Sardis
Venerable Makarios the Confessor of Pelekete
Righteous Ahaz
Holy Martyr Abraham the Bulgar
Venerable Gerontius of the Kiev Caves

Day 01-Apr-2023 Saturday

Fast Day ; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.
Readings of the day: Hebrews 9:24-28; Mark 8:27-31
Epistle Reading: St.
Paul's Letter to the Hebrews 9:1-7 BRETHREN, the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly sanctuary.
For a tent was prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence; it is called the Holy Place.
Behind the second curtain stood a tent called the Holy of Holies, having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, which contained a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat.
Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.
These preparations having thus been made, the priests go continually into the outer tent, performing their ritual duties; but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood which he offers for himself and for the errors of the people.

Gospel Reading: Luke 1:39-49, 56 In those days, Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, and she entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth.
And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy.
And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.
And Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.
For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.
And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her home.

Day 02-Apr-2023 Sunday

Fast Day ; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Our Holy Father Titus the Wonderworker (9th c.)

Very little is known of him. He took up the monastic life while still very young, and gave himself without reserve to the ascetical struggle, so much so that in the virtues of humility and obedience it was said that he exceeded 'not only the brethren, but all men.' In time, he became abbot of a monastery. During the iconoclast heresy, he stood unswervingly for the holy icons. Both in his own lifetime and after his death he was endowed with the gift of wonderworking. He reposed in peace sometime in the ninth century.

Holy Martyrs Amphianus and Aedesius (~306)

They were brothers from an eminent pagan family. While studying in Beirut, they embraced the Faith of Christ. Returning home, they found that they could no longer live with their pagan kinsmen, and fled to Caesarea in Palestine, placing themselves under the care of Pamphylus, a holy priest who instructed them in the teachings of the Faith and in the ascetical life.

Amphianus entered a pagan temple while the governor, Urbanus, was offering sacrifice. Seizing the governor's hand, he begged him to abandon his service to dead idols and to come to knowledge of the one God. For this he was put to torture, then cast into the sea with a stone around his neck.

Aedisius was sent to a copper mine in Palestine, then to Egypt. In Alexandria, Hierocles the governor was persecuting Christians by capturing Christian nuns and pious virgins and selling them into prostitution. Filled with holy zeal, Aedesius confronted the governor, denounced him, and struck him. For this he, like his brother, was tortured, then drowned.

Holy Martyrs Amphianus and Edesius

Holy Martyr Polycarp of Alexandria

Venerable Gregory of Nicomedia

Day 02-Apr-2023 Sunday

Fast Day ; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Gospel Reading: Fifth Sunday of Great Lent: St. Mary of Egypt
Hebrews 9:11-14; Mark 10:32-45
Epistle Reading: St.
Paul's Letter to the Hebrews 9:11-14 BRETHREN, when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.
For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Gospel Reading: Fifth Sunday of Great Lent: St. Mary of Egypt
At that time, Jesus took his twelve disciples, and he began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, 'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles; and they will mock him, and spit upon him, and scourge him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise.
And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him, and said to him, 'Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.
And he said to them, 'What do you want me to do for you?' And they said to him, 'Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.
But Jesus said to them, 'You do not know what you are asking.
Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?' And they said to him, 'We are able.
And Jesus said to them, 'The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.
And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant of James and John.
And Jesus called them to him and said to them, 'You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them.
But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be

your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.
For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING

We are now well past the halfway point of Lent, and one week away from the triumphal entry of our Lord into Jerusalem. In only a few short days the cries of the crowd will turn from exaltation and jubilation to derision and humiliation. Yet it is within this climate of anticipation that we are asked to revisit a key concept of our Christian lives, that is the concept of repentance.
At the start of our preparation for Lent we listened to the parable of the Publican and the Pharisee; now we are presented with the life of the great ascetic St. Mary of Egypt as a model of a real-life conversion experience. In St. Mary, we «discern true repentance which raises the sinner from the depths of corruption to angelic heights.»
Crucially, we are presented with a very real and deeply profound truth: firstly, that the Saint came to realise that the life that she had been living up to that point was a far cry from the life that God had called her to live, and secondly, that she was the only one who could take the decision to turn back to God.
Here we can recall the words of the Prodigal Son: «Father I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.»
We listened to this in the beginning of our journey into Lent. Now we are called to ask ourselves «how much of this has truly been made ours? How far have we come along the path of repentance?»
Truly, repentance is difficult for us in our modern lives! We try to make a small effort and are then put off by the slightest mishap. We must remember though that the saints, even when they sinned, had the strength to get up again with simplicity and well-being.
If they sinned, they repented from the depths of their heart, even unto death; however, they were not melancholic.
By contrast, if we sin we start asking ‘but why? Why did I do it? Why did I think

that?’ As if it were the strangest thing for us to sin… And who do we think we are? Are we so special, so infallible that there would never be a chance for us to sin? Brothers and sisters, the road is long, and more often than not we will struggle and we will fall. Yet we must get back up, try again and not become despondent.
We remember that God is always there, with and for us. It is folly to say «God will never give you more than you can handle.» Rather, it is only by the grace of God that we are able to overcome the struggles that we face, ultimately to transform us, just as he transformed St. Mary.
After all, God cannot love us any less than he already does, even when we may feel that our own love for Him is lacking.
In the wondrous life of St. Mary we see the passion of lust transfigured into the godly passion of love.
Let us renew our own repentance and let this thought guide the rest of our Lenten journey, so that we may offer up a worthy repentance before the dread judgement seat of Christ.
Rev. Petros Georgiou

Day 03-Apr-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Our Holy Father Nicetas the Confessor (824)

He was born in Caesarea of Bithynia. His widowed father became a monk, leaving Nicetas to the care of his grandmother. Nicetas himself, when he was grown, entered a monastery in Midikion, on the Sea of Marmara. After seven years of monastic life he was ordained hieromonk by Patriarch Tarasios. When Nikephoros, the abbot of the monastery, died, the brethren chose Nicetas as their new abbot.

When Leo the Armenian became Emperor, he revived the iconoclast heresy, even though it had been put down under the Empress Irene and condemned by an Ecumenical Council. The Emperor deposed and exiled the holy Patriarch Nicephoros, putting a heretic in his place. Nicetas, because he was known for his holiness and steadfast reverence for the holy icons, was imprisoned and tortured, but did not waver in his defense of Orthodoxy. Nicetas was taken from prison to prison, torture to torture, and exiled twice, until at last Leo the Armenian died and the Orthodox Emperor Michael came to the throne and freed all those imprisoned for Orthodoxy.

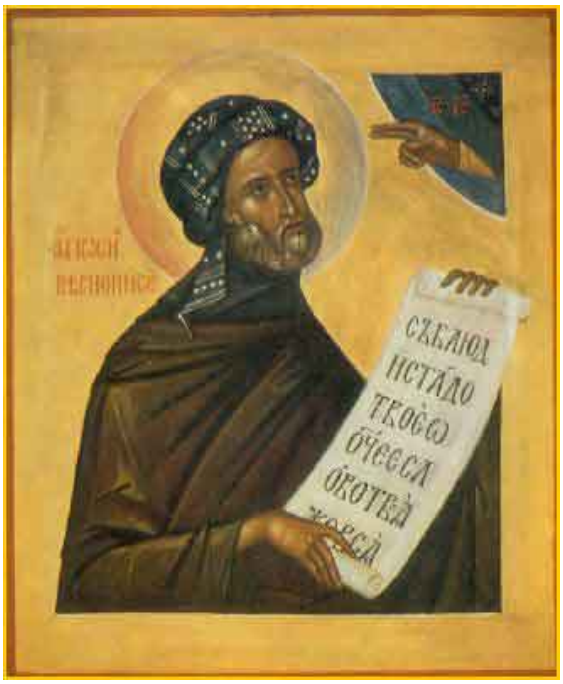
Once freed, Nicetas retired to a secluded hermitage near Constantinople, where he passed the remainder of his life in prayer and thanksgiving. When he died, his body was taken back to his monastery; during the journey, many of the sick who touched his holy body were healed.

Saint Joseph the Hymnographer (886)

"Saint Joseph was from Sicily, the son of Plotinus and Agatha. Because Sicily had been subjugated by the Moslems, he departed thence and, passing from place to place, came with Saint Gregory of Decapolis (see Nov. 20) to Constantinople, where he endured bitter afflictions because of his pious zeal. Travelling to Rome, he was captured by Arab pirates and taken to Crete, whence he later returned to Constantinople. He became an excellent hymnographer and reposed in holiness shortly after 886 (according to some, it was in 883). The melismatic canons of the Menaion are primarily the work of this Joseph; they bear his name in the acrostic of the Ninth Ode. He also composed most of the sacred book known as the Paracletike, which complements the Octoechos. For this reason, Joseph is called par excellence the Hymnographer." (Great Horologion)

The "bitter afflictions" which St Joseph suffered were probably due (judging from his dates) to his veneration of the holy icons.

Note: In the Slavic calendar he is commemorated on April 4.



Saint Seraphim of Vyritsa (1949) (March 21 OC)

Born in 1866, he married and had three children. In 1920, at the age of 54, he and his wife quietly separated and each entered monastic life. Eventually he became the spiritual father of the St. Alexander Nevsky Lavra in St. Petersburg, where, as a clairvoyant staretz, he also confessed thousands of laity. He said, "I am the storage room where people's afflictions gather." In imitation of his patron saint, he prayed for a thousand nights on a rock before an icon of St. Seraphim of Sarov. He reposed in the Lord in 1949 and the Church of Russia glorified him in August of 2000. Thus his whole life as a monk was spent under Communist persecution.

Holy New Martyr Paul the Russian

Venerable Hilerius of Mount Myrsinon

Day 03-Apr-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Isaiah 48:17-49:4; Genesis 27:1-41; Proverbs 19:16-25

Old Testament Readings: Isaiah 48:17-49:4
Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: 'I am the LORD your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you in the way you should go.
O that you had hearkened to my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea; your offspring would have been like the sand, and your descendants like its grains; their name would never be cut off or destroyed from before me.
Go forth from Babylon, flee from Chaldea, declare this with a shout of joy, proclaim it, send it forth to the end of the earth; say, 'The LORD has redeemed his servant Jacob!' They thirsted not when he led them through the deserts; he made water flow for them from the rock; he cleft the rock and the water gushed out.
'There is no peace,' says the LORD, 'for the wicked.
Listen to me, O coastlands, and hearken, you peoples from afar.
The LORD called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name.
He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away.
And he said to me, 'You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.
But I said, 'I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my right is with the LORD, and my recompense with my God.
Genesis 27:1-41
When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called Esau his older son, and said to him, 'My son'; and he answered, 'Here I am.
He said, 'Behold, I am old; I do not know the day of my death.
Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field, and hunt game for me, and prepare for me savory food, such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat; that I may bless you before I die.
Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to his son Esau.
So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game and bring it, Rebekah said to her son Jacob, 'I heard your father speak to your brother Esau, 'Bring me game, and prepare for me savory food, that I may eat it, and bless you before the LORD before I die.
Now therefore, my son, obey my word as I command you.
Go to the flock, and fetch me two good kids, that I may prepare from them savory

food for your father, such as he loves; and you shall bring it to your father to eat, so that he may bless you before he dies.
But Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, 'Behold, my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man.
Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him, and bring a curse upon myself and not a blessing.
His mother said to him, 'Upon me be your curse, my son; only obey my word, and go, fetch them to me.
So he went and took them and brought them to his mother; and his mother prepared savory food, such as his father loved.
Then Rebekah took the best garments of Esau her older son, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son; and the skins of the kids she put upon his hands and upon the smooth part of his neck; and she gave the savory food and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob.
So he went in to his father, and said, 'My father'; and he said, 'Here I am; who are you, my son?' Jacob said to his father, 'I am Esau your first-born.
I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, that you may bless me.
But Isaac said to his son, 'How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?' He answered, 'Because the LORD your God granted me success.
Then Isaac said to Jacob, 'Come near, that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not.
So Jacob went near to Isaac his father, who felt him and said, 'The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.
And he did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands; so he blessed him.
He said, 'Are you really my son Esau?' He answered, 'I am.
Then he said, 'Bring it to me, that I may eat of my son's game and bless you.
So he brought it to him, and he ate; and he brought him wine, and he drank.
Then his father Isaac said to him, 'Come near and kiss me, my son.
So he came near and kissed him; and he smelled the smell of his garments, and blessed him, and said, 'See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the LORD has blessed! May God give you of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine.
Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you.
Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down to you.
Cursed be every one who curses you, and blessed be every one who blesses you!'
As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, when Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, Esau his brother came in from his hunting.
He also prepared savory food, and brought it to his father.
And he said to his father, 'Let my father arise, and eat of his son's game, that you may bless me.

His father Isaac said to him, 'Who are you?' He answered, 'I am your son, your first-born, Esau.
Then Isaac trembled violently, and said, 'Who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me, and I ate it all before you came, and I have blessed him? – Yes, and he shall be blessed.
When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, 'Bless me, even me also, O my father!' But he said, 'Your brother came with guile, and he has taken away your blessing.
Esau said, 'Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times.
He took away my birthright; and behold, now he has taken away my blessing.
Then he said, 'Have you not reserved a blessing for me?' Isaac answered Esau, 'Behold, I have made him your lord, and all his brothers I have given to him for servants, and with grain and wine I have sustained him.
What then can I do for you, my son?' Esau said to his father, 'Have you but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father.
And Esau lifted up his voice and wept.
Then Isaac his father answered him: 'Behold, away from the fatness of the earth shall your dwelling be, and away from the dew of heaven on high.
By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother; but when you break loose you shall break his yoke from your neck.
Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him, and Esau said to himself, 'The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob.
Proverbs 19:16-25
He who keeps the commandment keeps his life; he who despises the word will die.
He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed.
Discipline your son while there is hope; do not set your heart on his destruction.
A man of great wrath will pay the penalty; for if you deliver him, you will only have to do it again.
Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom for the future.
Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will be established.
What is desired in a man is loyalty, and a poor man is better than a liar.
The fear of the LORD leads to life; and he who has it rests satisfied; he will not be visited by harm.
The sluggard buries his hand in the dish, and will not even bring it back to his mouth.
Strike a scoffer, and the simple will learn prudence; reprove a man of understanding, and he will gain knowledge.

Day 04-Apr-2023 Tuesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

St Zosimas, monk, of Palestine (523)

This is the monk who met St Mary of Egypt in the desert and preserved her story (See April 1). He reposed in peace at the age of 100, sometime in the sixth century.

Our Father George of Mount Maleon
Plato the Studite, Abbot of Sakkoudion
Virgin-Martyr Pherbutha of Persia along with her sister and servant
Venerable Joseph of the Kiev Caves

Day 04-Apr-2023 Tuesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Isaiah 49:6-10; Genesis 31:3-16; Proverbs 21:3-21

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 49:6-10
Thus says the LORD: 'I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.
Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the servant of rulers: 'Kings shall see and arise; princes, and they shall prostrate themselves; because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.
Thus says the LORD: 'In a time of favor I have answered you, in a day of salvation I have helped you; I have kept you and given you as a covenant to the people, to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages; saying to the prisoners, ‘Come forth,’ to those who are in darkness, ‘Appear.
’ They shall feed along the ways, on all bare heights shall be their pasture; they shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall smite them, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them.

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 31:3-16
Then the LORD said to Jacob, 'Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you.
So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah into the field where his flock was, and said to them, 'I see that your father does not regard me with favor as he did before. But the God of my father has been with me.
You know that I have served your father with all my strength; yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not permit him to harm me.
If he said, ‘The spotted shall be your wages,’ then all the flock bore spotted; and if he said, ‘The striped shall be your wages,’ then all the flock bore striped.
Thus God has taken away the cattle of your father, and given them to me.
In the mating season of the flock I lifted up my eyes, and saw in a dream that the he-goats which leaped upon the flock were striped, spotted, and mottled.
Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, ‘Jacob,’ and I said, ‘Here I am!’
And he said, ‘Lift up your eyes and see, all the goats that leap upon the flock are striped, spotted, and mottled; for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you.
I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and made a vow to me.

Now arise, go forth from this land, and return to the land of your birth.
' Then Rachel and Leah answered him, 'Is there any portion or inheritance left to us in our father's house? Are we not regarded by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and he has been using up the money given for us.
All the property which God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children; now then, whatever God has said to you, do.

Old Testament Reading: Proverbs 21:3-21
To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.
Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked, are sin.
The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but every one who is hasty comes only to want.
The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor and a snare of death.
The violence of the wicked will sweep them away, because they refuse to do what is just.
The way of the guilty is crooked, but the conduct of the pure is right.
It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a contentious woman.
The soul of the wicked desires evil; his neighbor finds no mercy in his eyes.
When a scoffer is punished, the simple becomes wise; when a wise man is instructed, he gains knowledge.
The righteous observes the house of the wicked; the wicked are cast down to ruin.
He who closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself cry out and not be heard.
A gift in secret averts anger; and a bribe in the bosom, strong wrath.
When justice is done, it is a joy to the righteous, but dismay to evildoers.
A man who wanders from the way of understanding will rest in the assembly of the dead.
He who loves pleasure will be a poor man; he who loves wine and oil will not be rich.
The wicked is a ransom for the righteous, and the faithless for the upright.
It is better to live in a desert land than with a contentious and fretful woman.
Precious treasure remains in a wise man's dwelling, but a foolish man devours it.
He who pursues righteousness and kindness will find life and honor.

Day 04-Apr-2023 Tuesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

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This is the monk who met St Mary of Egypt in the desert and preserved her story (See April 1). He reposed in peace at the age of 100, sometime in the sixth century.

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Plato the Studite, Abbot of Sakkoudion
Virgin-Martyr Pherbutha of Persia along with her sister and servant
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They shall feed along the ways, on all bare heights shall be their pasture; they shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall smite them, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them.
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So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah into the field where his flock was, and said to them, 'I see that your father does not regard me with favor as he did before. But the God of my father has been with me.
You know that I have served your father with all my strength; yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not permit him to harm me.
If he said, 'The spotted shall be your wages,' then all the flock bore spotted; and if he said, 'The striped shall be your wages,' then all the flock bore striped.
Thus God has taken away the cattle of your father, and given them to me.
In the mating season of the flock I lifted up my eyes, and saw in a dream that the he-goats which leaped upon the flock were striped, spotted, and mottled.
Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob,' and I said, 'Here I am!'
And he said, 'Lift up your eyes and see, all the goats that leap upon the flock are striped, spotted, and mottled; for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you.
I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and made a vow to me.
Now arise, go forth from this land, and return to the land of your birth.
Then Rachel and Leah answered him, 'Is there any portion or inheritance left to us in our father's house? Are we not regarded by him as foreigners? For he has sold

us, and he has been using up the money given for us.
All the property which God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children; now then, whatever God has said to you, do.
Proverbs 21:3-21
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Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked, are sin.
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The soul of the wicked desires evil; his neighbor finds no mercy in his eyes.
When a scoffer is punished, the simple becomes wise; when a wise man is instructed, he gains knowledge.
The righteous observes the house of the wicked; the wicked are cast down to ruin.
He who closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself cry out and not be heard.
A gift in secret averts anger; and a bribe in the bosom, strong wrath.
When justice is done, it is a joy to the righteous, but dismay to evildoers.
A man who wanders from the way of understanding will rest in the assembly of the dead.
He who loves pleasure will be a poor man; he who loves wine and oil will not be rich.
The wicked is a ransom for the righteous, and the faithless for the upright.
It is better to live in a desert land than with a contentious and fretful woman.
Precious treasure remains in a wise man's dwelling, but a foolish man devours it.
He who pursues righteousness and kindness will find life and honor.

Day 05-Apr-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Martyrs Agathopous and Theodoulos (303)

Agathopous was a deacon, very old, and Theodoulos a reader, very young, in the church in Thessalonica. During Diocletian's persecution the two were summoned to trial. They went joyfully, holding one another by the hand and exclaiming to all, 'We are Christians!' After flattery, cajolery, threats, imprisonment and starvation had failed to make them deny Christ, they were condemned to death by drowning. They were bound and a large stone tied to their necks; as they were about to be thrown into the sea, Agathopous cried, 'Behold, by a second baptism we are washed from our sins, and will go cleansed to Christ Jesus!' Their drowned bodies were soon washed ashore, and Christians gave them honorable burial. Not long afterward, Theodoulos appeared to his brethren in the form of a shining angel and told them to give all his goods to the poor.

Our Holy Father Mark of Trache (~400)

He is also called 'Mark the Athenian' because he was born in Athens. When his parents died, he pondered the transience of all earthly things, gave his goods to the poor, and embarked on a plank in the sea, asking God to lead him wherever He desired. By God's providence, Mark was cast up on the shores of Libya, where he settled as a hermit on a mountain called Trache. (Some say it was in Ethiopia, but this seems less likely.) There he lived for ninety-five years, never seeing another human being.

Saint Serapion visited him before his death and recorded his life. Serapion asked Mark if there were any Christians whose faith was so great that they could say to a mountain 'Get up and cast yourself into the sea,' and it would be so. Immediately the mountain on which they stood began to move like a wave, but Mark raised his hand and stilled it.

On his deathbed, St Mark prayed for the salvation of all men and gave up his soul to God. Saint Serapion saw an angel carrying Mark's soul, and a hand extended from heaven to receive it. Saint Mark was about 130 years old when he reposed.

The Holy and Glorious Martyrs Claudius and his Companions

Holy Martyrs Theodora and Didymus

Theodora of Thessalonica

Holy New Martyr George of Ephesus

Day 05-Apr-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Isaiah 58:1-11; Genesis 43:26-31; 45:1-16; Proverbs 21:23-22:4

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 58:1-11
Thus says the LORD: 'Cry aloud, spare not, lift up your voice like a trumpet; declare to my people their transgression, to the house of Jacob their sins.
Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that did righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near to God.
‘Why have we fasted, and thou seest it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and thou takest no knowledge of it?’ Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers.
Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with wicked fist.
Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high.
Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a man to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a rush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the LORD?
'Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.
Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.
'If you take away from the midst of you the yoke, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday.
And the LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your desire with good things, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 43:26-31; 45:1-16

When Joseph came home, they brought into the house to him the present which they had with them, and bowed down to him to the ground.
And he inquired about their welfare, and said, 'Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?' They said, 'Your servant our father is well, he is still alive.
And they bowed their heads and made obeisance.
And he lifted up his eyes, and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, 'Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me? God be gracious to you, my son!' Then Joseph made haste, for his heart yearned for his brother, and he sought a place to weep.
And he entered his chamber and wept there.
Then he washed his face and came out; and controlling himself he said, 'Let food be served.
(Chapter 45:1-16) Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him; and he cried, 'Make every one go out from me.
So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers.
And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it.
And Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am Joseph; is my father still alive?' But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence.
So Joseph said to his brothers, 'Come near to me, I pray you.
And they came near.
And he said, 'I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt.
And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.
For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest.
And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors.
So it was not you who sent me here, but God; and he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.
Make haste and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not tarry; you shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have; and there I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come; lest you and your household, and all that you have, come to poverty.
' And now your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth that speaks to you.
You must tell my father of all my splendor in Egypt, and of all that you have seen. Make haste and bring my father down here.
Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck.

And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.
When the report was heard in Pharaoh’s house, 'Joseph’s brothers have come,' it pleased Pharaoh and his servants well.

Old Testament Reading: Proverbs 21:23-22:4 He who keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps himself out of trouble.
'Scoffer' is the name of the proud, haughty man who acts with arrogant pride.
The desire of the sluggard kills him for his hands refuse to labor.
All day long the wicked covets, but the righteous gives and does not hold back.
The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination; how much more when he brings it with evil intent.
A false witness will perish, but the word of a man who hears will endure.
A wicked man puts on a bold face, but an upright man considers his ways.
No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel, can avail against the LORD.
The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the LORD.
A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold.
The rich and the poor meet together; the LORD is the maker of them all.
A prudent man sees danger and hides himself; but the simple go on, and suffer for it.
The reward for humility and fear of the LORD is riches and honor and life.

Day 06-Apr-2023 Thursday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

St Eutychius, patriarch of Constantinople (582)

He was born to devout and noble parents in Phrygia. Though his father was a prominent officer, he entered monastic life when young, and became abbot of a monastery in Amasea at the age of thirty. In 553 he was sent to the Fifth Ecumenical Council as the representative of the Metropolitan of Amasea. At the Council, he was one of those who argued, successfully, that heretics could be anathematized after their deaths. The most prominent case in point was Origen, the brilliant Christian philosopher who had written that all will eventually be saved. Eutychius' position thus earned him the enmity of the Origenists, who still made up an influential group in the Church. Saint Eutychius became a trusted confidante of the Emperor Justinian, and when Menas, Patriarch of Constantinople, reposed, Eutychius was chosen to replace him. Eutychius ruled in peace for twelve years, but was then cast into controversy when he boldly opposed one of the most hard-to-pronounce heresies in the history of the Church: Aphthartodocetism, the belief that Christ, before his resurrection, possessed an incorruptible body, not subject to hunger, thirst or pain (though the scriptures plainly speak of Christ being weary, hungry, thirsty, weeping). The Emperor Justinian for a time fell into this variant of the Monophysite heresy, and exiled Eutychius to his monastery for twelve years. During these years Eutychius showed himself to be a wonder-worker, healing many of their diseases through his prayers. Justinian repented shortly before his death, and his successor, Justin II, called Eutychius back to the Patriarchal throne, where he served the Church in peace until his repose at the age of seventy.

Holy 120 Martyrs of Persia

Our God-bearing Father Gregory the Sinaite

Saint Methodius, Equal-to-the-Apostles

Day 06-Apr-2023 Thursday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Isaiah 65:8-16; Genesis 46:1-7; Proverbs 23:15-24:5

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 65:8-16
Thus says the LORD: 'As the wine is found in the cluster, and they say, ‘Do not destroy it, for there is a blessing in it,’ so I will do for my servants’ sake, and not destroy them all.
I will bring forth descendants from Jacob, and from Judah inheritors of my mountains; my chosen shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there.
Sharon shall become a pasture for flocks, and the Valley of Achor a place for herds to lie down, for my people who have sought me.
But you who forsake the LORD, who forget my holy mountain, who set a table for Fortune and fill cups of mixed wine for Destiny; I will destine you to the sword, and all of you shall bow down to the slaughter; because, when I called, you did not answer, when I spoke, you did not listen, but you did what was evil in my eyes, and chose what I did not delight in.
Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: 'Behold, my servants shall eat, but you shall be hungry; behold, my servants shall drink, but you shall be thirsty; behold, my servants shall rejoice, but you shall be put to shame; behold, my servants shall sing for gladness of heart, but you shall cry out for pain of heart, and shall wail for anguish of spirit.
You shall leave your name to my chosen for a curse, and the Lord GOD will slay you; but his servants he will call by a different name.
So that he who blesses himself in the land shall bless himself by the God of truth, and he who takes an oath in the land shall swear by the God of truth; because the former troubles are forgotten and are hid from my eyes.

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 46:1-7
So Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.
And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night, and said, 'Jacob, Jacob.
And he said, 'Here am I.
Then he said, 'I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt; for I will there make of you a great nation.
I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again; and Joseph’s hand shall close your eyes.

Then Jacob set out from Beersheba; and the sons of Israel carried Jacob their father, their little ones, and their wives, in the wagons which Pharaoh had sent to carry him.
They also took their cattle and their goods, which they had gained in the land of Canaan, and came into Egypt, Jacob and all his offspring with him, his sons, and his sons' sons with him, his daughters, and his sons' daughters; all his offspring he brought with him into Egypt.

Old Testament Reading: Proverbs 23:15-24:5
My son, if your heart is wise, my heart too will be glad.
My soul will rejoice when your lips speak what is right.
Let not your heart envy sinners, but continue in the fear of the LORD all the day.
Surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off.
Hear, my son, and be wise, and direct your mind in the way.
Be not among winebibbers, or among gluttonous eaters of meat; for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe a man with rags.
Hearken to your father who begot you, and do not despise your mother when she is old.
Buy truth, and do not sell it; buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding.
The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice; he who begets a wise son will be glad in him.
Let your father and mother be glad, let her who bore you rejoice.
My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways.
For a harlot is a deep pit; an adventuress is a narrow well.
She lies in wait like a robber and increases the faithless among men.
Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who tarry long over wine, those who go to try mixed wine.
Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly.
At the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like an adder.
Your eyes will see strange things, and your mind utter perverse things.
You will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, like one who lies on the top of a mast.
'They struck me,' you will say, 'but I was not hurt; they beat me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake? I will seek another drink.
Be not envious of evil men, nor desire to be with them; for their minds devise violence, and their lips talk of mischief.
By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches.
A wise man is mightier than a strong man, and a man of knowledge than he who has strength.

Day 07-Apr-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Martyr Calliopius, with his mother Theoclea (304)

Calliopius was the only son of a senator from Pamphylia and his wife Theoclea, who had long prayed to God for a child. The devout Theoclea reared her son in purity of life and love for God from infancy. When persecution of Christians broke out under Maximian, Theoclea put Calliopius aboard a ship bound for Pompeiopolis to save him from the persecutors. But Calliopius, as soon as he disembarked, encountered a pagan festival, where he was arrested when he refused to make sacrifice to the idols. Brought before the governor Maximus, he freely confessed that he was a Christian. For this he was cruelly tortured and thrown into prison. His mother, hearing of his torments, sold her goods and hurried to comfort him and encourage him in his martyrdom.

Calliopius was sentenced to death by crucifixion, as it happened on Holy Thursday; but the holy Theoclea bribed the officials to postpone the execution by one day, so that her son might imitate the Lord's Crucifixion on the day that He endured it; she also prevailed upon the torturers to crucify Calliopius upside-down (like St Peter) in humility toward the Lord. When her son's lifeless body was taken down from the cross, Theoclea cast herself upon it and died.

St George the Confessor, bishop of Mitylene (~820)

The righteous George was Metropolitan of Mitylene. In his old age, a persecution was unleashed against the Church by the iconoclast Emperor Leo V (the Armenian). To further his plans, the Emperor summoned a Council of bishops which he expected to support his iconoclasm. At the Council, George and some other faithful bishops refused to follow the Emperor's wishes, and openly stood in defense of the icons. For his stance, George was publicly humiliated, then sent into exile at Cherson on the Black Sea. There, after many years of extreme privation, the holy bishop died. By his prayers many were healed, both during his life and after his repose.

St Nilus (Nil Sorsky), abbot of Sora (1508)

St Nilus established the monastic skete (a community of monks living separately like hermits, but sharing some common life) in Russia. He took one side of a religious controversy that troubled the Russian Church's life for many years. St Nilus and his disciples claimed that prayer and ascetic struggle are the whole purpose of monastic life, and opposed monastic ownership of property, or involvement in works such as almshouses, hospitals, and

orphanages. Joseph, abbot of Volokalamsk, took up the argument on the other side, insisting that the Church and its monks should be involved in good works (and have the means to do those works) as well as in prayer. The two groups became known as the "Possessors" (Joseph's side) and the "Non-Possessors" (Nilus' side). Each group had reason to be troubled by the other's extremes: Monasteries owned huge amounts of land, kept serfs, and were subject to corruption by involvement in finance; at the same time, the Church formed most of the 'welfare' system of Russia, and the Non-possessors did not suggest how the poor were to be tended, or orphans cared for, without the monasteries' charity. Many of the Non-possessors tended toward a non-Russian and almost un-Orthodox puritanism, condemning beautiful churches and icons as diversions from true spirituality.

The Possessors (not surprisingly) were favored by the Tsarist government, and eventually won out. The artificial division of the Church into mystical and practical 'parties,' and the victory of one of the parties, led to a period of stagnation in the Russian church that was only corrected two hundred years later, when a great renewal of religious life, characterized by such holy Fathers as St Paisios Velichkovsky and St Seraphim of Sarov, restored the fullness and balance of Orthodox life to the Russian church.

An indication of the fullness of Orthodoxy: the Church has glorified not only St Nilus but his opponent St Joseph of Volokalamsk, who is commemorated on Sept. 9.

Saint Savvas the New of Kalymnos (1948) (March 25 OC)

He was born in Thrace to a poor family. Early in life he desired to become a monk and, failing to get his parents' consent, left secretly for Mt Athos. After several years there, he traveled to Palestine, where he entered the Monastery of St George the Chozebite. In 1903 he was ordained to the priesthood. From 1907–1916 he lived in severe asceticism as a hermit on the banks of the Jordan. After living in several monasteries in Greece, he served with St Nektarios of Aegina for the last year of the Saint's life (he reposed in 1920). After six more years on Aegina, Fr Savvas moved to the island of Kalymnos, where he spent the remainder of his life. He lived in quietness and asceticism, acquiring a reputation throughout the island as a confessor and spiritual father. He slept only a few hours each night, and gave away any money that came to him the same day, since he believed that it was wrong for a monk to have money in his cell after nightfall.

Saint Savvas reposed on the Old Calendar feast of the Annunciation in 1948. Innumerable miracles and healings have been wrought through his intercession. A striking example occurred in 1957: A group of young islanders were talking about the Saint, and one of them, who doubted his sanctity, said 'If this lamp breaks I'll believe.' At that moment the lamp shattered spontaneously.

The following account is from Mother Nectaria McLees' Evlogeite! A

pilgrim's guide to Greece: 'His last words of counsel to his nuns were, "...love... is the bond of perfection," and to the abbess he said, "Love, love, love (Agapa, agapa, agapa)." Then he clapped his hands six times, saying "The Lord, the Lord, the Lord..."

'In 1957 his relics were uncovered in the presence of Metropolitan Isidoros of Kalymnos, who described them as "the bones being perfectly joined, and the vestments intact." When the sepulchre was opened a divine and otherworldly fragrance covered the area, even to the outskirts of town far below. In 1961, an iconographer of the Skete of Kapsokalyvia on Mount Athos painted an icon of St. Savvas at Abbess Philothei's request. The icon arrived by ferry, and as it was being transferred from the post office to the customs house where the nuns would pick it up, the convent bell began ringing by itself and continued until the icon was brought to the monastery.'

St Justin (Popovic) of Chelije in Serbia (1979) (March 25 OC)

He was born on the Feast of the Annunciation 1894, in Vranje, South Serbia, to a family whose seven previous generations had been headed by priests (Popovich means 'family or son of a priest' in Serbian). He began reading the scriptures at a young age, and as an adult carried a New Testament with him, reading three chapters every day. He studied at the Seminary of St Sava in Belgrade while St Nikolai Velimirovic (March 18) was on the faculty. In 1914, Blagoje (as he was called before his tonsure) completed the nine-year seminary program. He desired to become a monk, but postponed entry into the monastic ranks due to the outbreak of war and the poor health of his parents. He spent the war caring for his parents and serving as a student nurse.

In 1915 he was tonsured a monk under the name Justin, after St Justin the Philosopher. Shortly thereafter he traveled to Petrograd to study at the seminary; there he acquired a deep, first-hand knowledge of the Russian ascetical tradition and a lifelong love of Russian spirituality, especially that of the common people. He then attended Oxford University from 1916 to 1919, writing a doctoral dissertation which was rejected. After a brief return to Belgrade, he entered the Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Athens. As in Russia, he used his time there not merely to study but to drink in the Orthodox spirituality of the Greek people. He was ordained to the diaconate while in Greece, then to the priesthood after returning to Belgrade in 1922. He wept 'as a newborn babe' throughout his ordination service. One of his first labors as a priest was to translate the Divine Liturgy into modern Serbian. During this period he came to know Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky (later first hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church abroad) and St John Maximovich, both of whom were living in Serbia as exiles from the Russian Revolution.

Father Justin's preaching, writing and spiritual counsel became known throughout his country. In 1931 he was sent to Czechoslovakia to help in reorganizing the Church there (then under the jurisdiction of the Serbian

Church), which was greatly tried and weakened by Uniatism. Realizing the people's crying need a clear exposition of the Faith in their own language, he began in 1932 his three-volume Dogmas of the Orthodox Church. The first volume was so well-received that Fr Justin was made Professor of Dogmatics at the Seminary of St Sava, where he remained, completing the Dogmas and several other books, until the end of World War II. The new atheistic Communist regime then banned him from the university system, and Fr Justin lived from that time on in various Serbian monasteries.

In 1948 he entered Chelije Monastery, where he remained until his repose in 1979. He became Archimandrite and spiritual head of the Monastery. It was during this period that he emerged as a great light of Orthodoxy: pious believers from all parts of Yugoslavia, from Greece, and from all over the world traveled to Chelije to hear the holy Justin's preaching and seek his counsel.

Saint Justin reposed in peace in 1979 at the age of 85, on the Feast of the Annunciation — the date of his birth. Since his repose, many miracles have been witnessed at his grave: healings, flashes of unearthly light from his tomb, and conversions of unbelievers by his prayers. His many writings are increasingly recognized as a fount of pure Orthodox teaching in the midst of our dark time.

Venerable Daniel of Pereyaslavl

Holy Martyrs Rufinus, Aquilina and Companions

Day 07-Apr-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Isaiah 66:10-24; Genesis 49:33-50:26; Proverbs 31:8-31

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 66:10-24
'Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her; that you may suck and be satisfied with her consoling breasts; that you may drink deeply with delight from the abundance of her glory.
For thus says the LORD: 'Behold, I will extend prosperity to her like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall suck, you shall be carried upon her hip, and dandled upon her knees.
As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.
You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice; your bones shall flourish like the grass; and it shall be known that the hand of the LORD is with his servants, and his indignation is against his enemies.
'For behold, the LORD will come in fire, and his chariots like the stormwind, to render his anger in fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire.
For by fire will the LORD execute judgment, and by his sword, upon all flesh; and those slain by the LORD shall be many.
'Those who sanctify and purify themselves to go into the gardens, following one in the midst, eating swine’s flesh and the abomination and mice, shall come to an end together, says the LORD.
'For I know their works and their thoughts, and I am coming to gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and shall see my glory, and I will set a sign among them.
And from them I will send survivors to the nations, to Tarshish, Put, and Lud, who draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands afar off, that have not heard my fame or seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the nations.
And they shall bring all your brethren from all the nations as an offering to the LORD, upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon dromedaries, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the LORD, just as the Israelites bring their cereal offering in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD.
And some of them also I will take for priests and for Levites, says the LORD.
'For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before me, says the LORD; so shall your descendants and your name remain.

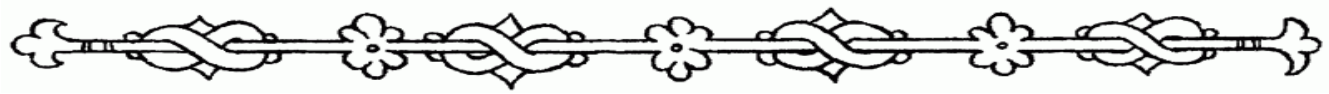
From new moon to new moon, and from sabbath to sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, says the LORD.
'And they shall go forth and look on the dead bodies of the men that have rebelled against me; for their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 49:33-50:26 When Jacob finished charging his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed, and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.
Then Joseph fell on his father’s face, and wept over him, and kissed him.
And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father.
So the physicians embalmed Israel; forty days were required for it, for so many are required for embalming.
And the Egyptians wept for him seventy days.
And when the days of weeping for him were past, Joseph spoke to the household of Pharaoh, saying, 'If now I have found favor in your eyes, speak, I pray you, in the ears of Pharaoh, saying, My father made me swear, saying, ‘I am about to die: in my tomb which I hewed out for myself in the land of Canaan, there shall you bury me.
’ Now therefore let me go up, I pray you, and bury my father; then I will return.
And Pharaoh answered, 'Go up, and bury your father, as he made you swear.
So Joseph went up to bury his father; and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, as well as all the household of Joseph, his brothers, and his father’s household; only their children, their flocks, and their herds were left in the land of Goshen.
And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen; it was a very great company.
When they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they lamented there with a very great and sorrowful lamentation; and he made a mourning for his father seven days.
When the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning on the threshing floor of Atad, they said, 'This is a grievous mourning to the Egyptians.
Therefore the place was named Abelmizraim; it is beyond the Jordan.
Thus his sons did for him as he had commanded them; for his sons carried him to the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field at Machpelah, to the east of Mamre, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite, to possess as a burying place.
After he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt with his brothers and all who had gone up with him to bury his father.
When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, 'It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil which we did to him.
So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, 'Your father gave this command before he died, ‘Say to Joseph, Forgive, I pray you, the transgression of your brothers

and their sin, because they did evil to you.
’ And now, we pray you, forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.
Joseph wept when they spoke to him.
His brothers also came and fell down before him, and said, 'Behold, we are your servants.
But Joseph said to them, 'Fear not, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.
So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.
Thus he reassured them and comforted them.
So Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he and his father’s house; and Joseph lived a hundred and ten years.
And Joseph saw Ephraim’s children of the third generation; the children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were born upon Joseph’s knees.
And Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am about to die; but God will visit you, and bring you up out of this land to the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.
Then Joseph took an oath of the sons of Israel, saying, 'God will visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.
So Joseph died, being a hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

Old Testament Reading: Proverbs 31:8-31 Open your mouth for the dumb, for the rights of all who are left desolate.
Open your mouth, judge righteously, maintain the rights of the poor and needy.
A good wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels.
The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain.
She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.
She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands.
She is like the ships of the merchant, she brings her food from afar.
She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and tasks for her maidens.
She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.
She girds her loins with strength and makes her arms strong.
She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.
Her lamp does not go out at night.
She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle.
She opens her hand to the poor, and reaches out her hands to the needy.
She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet.
She makes herself coverings; her clothing is fine linen and purple.
Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land.

She makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers girdles to the merchant.
Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come.
She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.
She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness.
Her children rise up



Day 08-Apr-2023 Saturday

Fast Day ; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Holy Apostles Herodion, Agabus, Rufus, Asyncritus, Phlegon and Hermas

All of these are numbered among the Seventy, and all are mentioned in the Epistles of St Paul.

Herodion was a kinsmen of St Paul: 'Salute Herodion my kinsman' (Romans 16:11). After many sufferings for the Gospel, he worked with the Apostle Peter in Rome, and was beheaded with him.

Agabus was granted a spirit of prophecy: two of his prophecies are important in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 11:28, 21:11).

Rufus was Bishop of Thebes. 'Salute Rufus, chosen in the Lord' (Romans 16:13).

Asyncritus (Romans 16:14) was Bishop of Hyrcania in Asia.

Phlegon, (Romans 16:14) was Bishop of Marathon in Thrace.

Hermas (Romans 16:14) was a bishop in Dalmatia.

Saint Celestine, Pope of Rome (432)

A champion of the Orthodox faith, he sent an epistle to the Third Ecumenical Council, refuting and condemning the Nestorian heresy. He reposed in peace.

Saint Niphon, Bishop of Novgorod

Venerable Rufus the Obedient of the Kiev Caves

Holy New Martyr John Naukliros

Day 08-Apr-2023 Saturday

Fast Day ; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.
Readings of the day: Hebrews 12:28-13:8; John 11:1-45

Epistle Reading: St.Paul's Letter to the Hebrews 12:28-29; 13:1-8
BRETHREN, let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire.
Let brotherly love continue.
Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.
Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them; and those who are ill-treated, since you also are in the body.
Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for God will judge the immoral and adulterous.
Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, 'I will never fail you nor forsake you.
Hence we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid; what can man do to me?' Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God; consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith.
Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.

Gospel Reading: Lazarus Saturday: John 11:1-45
At that time, a certain man was ill, Lazaros of Bethany, from the village of Mary and her sister Martha.
It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazaros was ill.
So the sisters sent to him, saying, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.
But when Jesus heard it he said, 'This illness is not unto death; it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it.
Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazaros.
So when he heard that he was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.
Then after this he said to the disciples, 'Let us go into Judea again.
The disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were but now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?' Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any one walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world.

But if any one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.
Thus he spoke, and then he said to them, 'Our friend Lazaros has fallen asleep, but I go to awake him out of sleep.
The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.
Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep.
Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazaros is dead; and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe.
But let us go to him.
Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.
Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazaros had already been in the tomb four days.
Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother.
When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary sat in the house.
Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.
And even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.
Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.
Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.
Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.
Do you believe this?' She said to him, 'Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world.
When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying quietly, 'The Teacher is here and is calling for you.
And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him.
Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him.
When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there.
Then Mary, when she came where Jesus was and saw him, fell at his feet, saying

to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.
When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled; and he said, 'Where have you laid him?'
They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.
Jesus wept.
So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?' Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb; it was a cave, and a stone lay upon it.
Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.
Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.
Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone.
And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, 'Father, I thank you that you have heard me.
I knew that you have heard me always, but I have said this on account of the people standing by, that they may believe that you did send me.
When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazaros, come out.
The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with bandages, and his face wrapped with a cloth.
Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.
Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him.

Sermon of the Gospel reading
This day, along with Palm Sunday, occupies a special position between Lent and Holy Week.
Following the forty days of penitence which have just ended, and immediately before the days of darkness and mourning which are to follow in the week of the Passion, there come two days of joy and triumph on which the Church keeps festival. The Saturday before Palm Sunday celebrates the raising of Lazarus at Bethany (John 11:1-46).
This miracle is performed by Christ as a reassurance to His disciples before the coming Passion: they are to understand that, though He suffers and dies, yet He is Lord and Victor over death. The resurrection of Lazarus is a prophecy in the form of an action. It foreshadows Christ's own Resurrection eight days later, and at the same time it anticipates the resurrection of all the righteous on the Last Day: Lazarus is 'the saving first-fruits of the regeneration of the world.'
As the liturgical texts emphasize, the miracle at Bethany reveals the two natures of Christ the God-man.
Christ asks where Lazarus is laid and weeps for him, and so He shows the fullness of His manhood, involving as it does human ignorance and genuine grief for a

beloved friend.
Then, disclosing the fullness of His divine power, Christ raises Lazarus from the dead, even though his corpse has already begun to decompose and stink.
This double fullness of the Lord's divinity and His humanity is to be kept in view throughout Holy Week, and above all on Great Friday.
On the Cross we see a genuinely human agony, both physical and mental, but we see more than this: we see not only suffering man but suffering God.

Day 09-Apr-2023 Sunday

Palm Sunday, Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Martyr Eupsychius of Caesarea in Cappadocia (362)

This holy martyr was a married man, living in Cappadocia. During the reign of Julian the Apostate he, along with some other Christians, destroyed the pagan temple to the goddess Fortuna. (The Prologue says that it was his wedding day). For this he and his companions were cruelly tortured, then beheaded.

At that time St Basil the Great governed the Church in that part of Cappadocia. When the apostate Emperor, going to fight the Persians, came to the town in which Eupsychius was martyred, St Basil went to meet him, bringing three barley loaves as a sign of honor and welcome. The Emperor, ever hostile to Christians, ordered that the bishop be given a fistful of hay in return. Saint Basil said to the Emperor 'You ridicule us now, O King; we bring you bread, by which we are fed, and you give us miserable food that you, with all your power, are unable to turn into nourishment for men.' The Emperor perished in the Persian campaign.

Venerable Martyr Vadim

Newly-appeared Martyrs Raphael, Nicholas and Irene of Lesbos

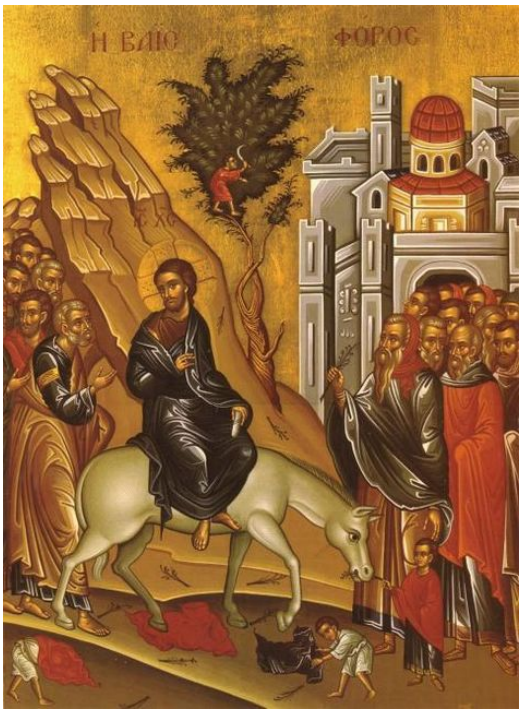
Day 09-Apr-2023 Sunday

Palm Sunday, Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Gospel Reading: Palm Sunday
Philippians 4:4-9; John 12:1-18
Matins
Gospel Reading: Matthew 21:1-11; 15-17 At that time, when Jesus drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, he sent two disciples, saying to them, 'Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me.
If any one says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord has need of them,’ and he will send them immediately.
This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, 'Tell the daughter of Zion, Behold, your king is coming to you, humble and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their garments on them, and he sat thereon.
Most of the crowd spread their garments on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.
And the crowds that went before him and that followed him shouted, 'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!' And when he entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, 'Who is this?' And the crowds said, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee.
But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' they were indignant; and they said to him, 'Do you hear what they are saying?' And Jesus said to them, 'Yes; have you never read, ‘Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, you have brought perfect praise’?' And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there.

Epistle Reading: St.
Paul’s Letter to the Philippians 4:4-9 BRETHREN, rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.
Let all men know your forbearance.
The Lord is at hand.
Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.
What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you.



Six days before Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazaros was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.
There they made him a supper; Martha served, and Lazaros was one of those at table with him.
Mary took a pound of costly ointment of pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment.
But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was to betray him), said 'Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?' This he said, not that he cared for the poor but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box he used to take what was put into it.
Jesus said, 'Let her alone, let her keep it for the day of my burial.
The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.
When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came, not only on account of Jesus but also to see Lazaros, whom he had raised from the dead.
So the chief priests planned to put Lazaros also to death, because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.
The next day a great crowd who had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem.
So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying, 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!' And Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it; as it is written, 'Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!' His disciples did not understand this at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that this had been written of him and had been done to him.
The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazaros out of the tomb and raised him from the dead bore witness.
The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this

sign.

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING

How strange it seems to be celebrating a joyful feast before this evening when the church will be plunged into gloom as we bring out the icon of the Bridegroom with the divine head surrounded by thorns! We chanted at Friday Vespers: We have completed the forty days which profit our souls. Now let us beg the Lover of the human race, 'Enable us to see the holy week of your passion so that we may glorify your mighty work.' The Great Forty Days have passed; we celebrate the raising of Lazaros as a foretaste of the Resurrection and wave our palms in spirit with the children as we proclaim, 'Hosanna in the Highest! Blessed is the one who come in the name of the Lord.' We do well to muse on the apolytíkion, 'O Christ God, you confirmed the universal resurrection by raising Lazarus from the dead before your passion. O Vanquisher of Death, we cry out to you like the children with their palms of victory, 'Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.' Even in the midst of sorrow for our sins and the contemplation of the Divine Passion there is joy in the ultimate victory of Christ over the powers of darkness. We may have worried about our besetting sins over the last forty days. We may have despaired about the state of the world. We may have been overwhelmed by a family problem. The words of the Apostle Paul in today’s apóstolos give us a way of coping. 'Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything let your requests be made known to God through prayer and pleas with thanksgiving.' We pour out our hearts before an icon at home, we tearfully light our candles in church and we make our penitential requests to God. But we make them with thanksgiving, realising with the Apostle Paul, 'No trial has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tried beyond your strength, but with the trial will also provide the way of escape so that you may be able to endure it.' (1 Cor. 10) Let us with the children greet the Saviour, 'Hosanna in the Highest!'

Day 10-Apr-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Martyrs Terence, Africanus, Maximus, Pompeius and 36 with them, beheaded at Carthage (250)

These African Christians suffered during the persecution of the Church by the emperor Decius, during which a great many Christians denied the faith rather than suffer. These faithful few boldly upheld the Faith and, after many torments, were condemned to death by beheading. The went to their execution singing psalms and hymns of thanksgiving, and received the crown of martyrdom in 250.

In the early centuries of the Church, North Africa, especially the region of Carthage, was one of the centers of the Christian Faith, comparable to Asia Minor.

Six Thousand Holy Martyrs in Georgia (1615)

"In the wilderness of David-Garejeli in Georgia there were twelve monasteries, in which monks had lived the ascetic life for centuries. In 1615, Shah Abbas I invaded Georgia, laid it waste and slew innumerable Christians. One day, while out hunting at dawn on Easter Day intself, he saw the light of many candles shining in the hills. This was the monks of all twelve monasteries in procession all round the Church of the Resurrection, walking with candles in their hands. When the Shah discovered that it was monks, he asked in disbelief: 'Isn't the whole of Georgia put to the sword by now?', and ordered his generals to go and slaughter the monks at once. An angel of God appeared to Abbot Arsenius, and revealed their imminent death to him, and Arsenius informed the brethren. They then all received Communion in the Holy Misteries and prepared for death. Then the attackers arrived, hacked the abbot to pieces when he came out ahead of the others, and then killed all the rest. They all suffered with honour and were crowned with unfading wreaths in 1615. Thus ended the history of these famous monasteries, which had been like a flame of spiritual enlightenment in Georgia for more than 1,000 years. There remain just two today: St David and St John the Baptist. The King of Georgia, Archil, gathered the remains of all the martyrs and buried them. Their relics are to this day full of myrrh for the healing of those in sickness." (Prologue)

New Hieromartyr Gregory, Patriarch of Constantinople (1821)

He was born on the Peloponnese, and became Archbishop of Smyrna in 1785. He served at a time when revolutionary feeling and activity was increasing among the Greek people, and witnessed the cruel retribution that

the Ottoman Turks visited on any evidence of rebellion among their subject people.

Once in Smyrna, seeing that an action he had taken was causing discord in his dioceses, he came down from the hierarchical throne during a service, prostrated himself before the faithful and asked their forgiveness.

He was elected Patriarch of Constantinople in 1797. Under the Turkokratia, the Patriarch was not only the head of the Greek churches but the secular ruler of the Greek people, bound by oath to respect the authority of the Sultan. This, combined with Gregory's personal experience of the treatment of Greek rebels, made him a staunch opponent of revolutionary activity among his people. Still, when revolutionaries on the Peloponnese declared Greek independence from Turkey on March 25, 1821, Turkish retribution was harsh: On Pascha, April 10, after serving the Paschal Liturgy, the aged Patriarch was arrested by the Turkish authorities. He was tortured in an effort to have him reveal the names of those heading the revolution, then was offered his freedom if he would convert to Islam. Gregory answered, 'You ask in vain: the Patriarch of Christians dies a Christian.' He (along with other clergy and hierarchs) was hanged as a traitor on the gate of the patriarchal compound. An eyewitness, a British clergyman visiting Constantinople, wrote: 'His body, attenuated by abstinence and emaciated by age, had not sufficient weight to cause immediate death. He continued for a long time in pain which no friendly hand dared abridge, and the darkness of night came on before his final convulsions were over.' His body was left hanging for three days, then sold by the Turkish authorities to a Jewish mob, who mutilated the body, then weighted it about the neck with a stone and threw it into the sea. Despite this, the body was found floating at sea by a Greek merchant ship captain. When the body was identified as that of the martyred Patriarch, it was secretly taken to Odessa, where Orthodox church leaders took it under their care. Tsar Alexander I ordered a state funeral for the holy hierarch, which was celebrated on June 17 1821 in Odessa.

In 1871 the relics were returned to Greece by Tsar Alexander III. They were incorrupt, though fifty years had passed since his death. Saint Gregory was officially glorified in 1921. His relics may be venerated at the Metropolitan Cathedral in Athens.

Six Thousand Martyrs in Georgia
Prophetess Huldah
Holy New Martyr Demos of Smyrna
Holy Martyrs Abbess Anastasia and her 34 Nuns

Day 10-Apr-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Matthew 24:3-35
Strict Fast
Gospel Readings: Matthew 21:18-43

At that time, Jesus was returning to the city, he was hungry.
And seeing a fig tree by the wayside he went to it, and found nothing on it but leaves only.
And he said to it, 'May no fruit ever come from you again!' And the fig tree withered at once.
When the disciples saw it they marveled, saying, 'How did the fig tree wither at once?' And Jesus answered them, 'Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and never doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it will be done.
And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.
' And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, 'By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?' Jesus answered them, 'I also will ask you a question; and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things.
The baptism of John, whence was it? From heaven or from men? ' And they argued with one another, 'If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'From men,' we are afraid of the multitude; for all hold that John was a prophet.
So they answered Jesus, 'We do not know.
And he said to them, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.
What do you think? A man had two sons; and he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.
And he answered, 'I will not'; but afterward he repented and went.
And he went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go.
Which of the two did the will of his father?' They said, 'The first.
Jesus said to them, 'Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the harlots go into

the kingdom of God before you.
For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the harlots believed him; and even when you saw it, you did not afterward repent and believe him.
'Hear another parable.
There was a householder who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, and dug a wine press in it, and built a tower, and let it out to tenants, and went into another country.
When the season of fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants, to get his fruit; and the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another.
Again he sent other servants, more than the first; and they did the same to them.
Afterward he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.
But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.
And they took him and cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him.
When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?' They said to him, 'He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.
Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures: 'The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it.
Matthew 24:3-35 At that time, as Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?' And Jesus answered them, 'Take heed that no one leads you astray.
For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray.
And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet.
For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: all this is but the beginning of the sufferings.
Then they will deliver you up to tribulation, and put you to death; and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake.
And then many will fall away, and betray one another, and hate one another.
And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.
And because wickedness is multiplied, most men's love will grow cold.
But he who endures to the end will be saved.
And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come.
So when you see the desolating sacrilege spoken of by the prophet Daniel,

standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains; let him who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house; and let him who is in the field not turn back to take his mantle. And alas for those who are with child and for those who give suck in those days! Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a sabbath.
For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.
And if those days had not been shortened, no human being would be saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.
Then if anyone says to you, 'Lo, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it.
For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.
Lo, I have told you beforehand.
So, if they say to you, 'Lo, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out; if they say, 'Lo, he is in the inner rooms,' do not believe it.
For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of man.
Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together.
Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; and he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.
From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near.
So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates.
Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place.
Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Day 11-Apr-2023 Tuesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Hieromartyr Antipas, bishop of Pergamum (92), disciple of St John the Theologian

He is mentioned by name in the book of Revelation, where Christ says to the Church of Pergamum "I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is; and thou holdest fast to My Name, and hast not denied My Faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful Martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth" (Rev. 2:13). He was bishop of Pergamum and, during the reign of Domitian, when he was very old, was put into a bronze bull which was then heated in fire until he died.

The Great Horologion notes that the faithful pray to St Antipas for ailments of the teeth.

Holy Martyrs Processus and Martinian (1st c.)

They were jailers in the Roman prison that held Sts Peter and Paul, and came to faith in Christ through the witness of the two holy Apostles. After receiving baptism, Processus and Martinian released the saints from prison. As the Apostles were leaving Rome, the Lord appeared to Peter on the Appian way. When Peter asked him where he was going, he replied, 'To Rome, to be crucified once again.' Abashed, the Apostles returned to Rome to face their martyrdom. Processus and Martinian were beheaded along with St Paul.

Venerable Pharmuthius the Anchorite

Saint Barsanuphius, Bishop of Tver

Day 11-Apr-2023 Tuesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Matthew 24:36-26:2

Gospel Reading: Matthew 24:36-51; 25:1-46; 26:1-2
The Lord said to his disciples, 'Of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but the Father only.
As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man.
For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of man.
Then two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left.
Two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left.
Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.
But know this, that if the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have let his house be broken into.
Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.
'Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master when he comes will find so doing.
Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions.
But if that wicked servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed,’ and begins to beat his fellow servants, and eats and drinks with the drunken, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and put him with the hypocrites; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.
'Then the kingdom of heaven shall be compared to ten maidens who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.
Five of them were foolish, and five were wise.
For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.
As the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.
But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.
’ Then all those maidens rose and trimmed their lamps.
And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going

out.
’ But the wise replied, ‘Perhaps there will not be enough for us and for you; go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.
’ And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast; and the door was shut.
Afterward the other maidens came also, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open to us.
’ But he replied, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.
’ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of man shall come.

'For it will be as when a man going on a journey called his servants and entrusted to them his property; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability.
Then he went away.
He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them; and he made five talents more.
So also, he who had the two talents made two talents more.
But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master’s money.
Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.
And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.
’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master.
’ And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.
’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master.
’ He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not winnow; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground.
Here you have what is yours.
’ But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sowed, and gather where I have not winnowed? Then you

ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming
I should have received what was my own with interest.
So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has the ten talents.
For to every one who has will more be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away.
And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.

'When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.
Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left.
Then the King will say to those at his right hand,
‘Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me,
I was in prison and you came to me.
’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.
’ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.
’ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.
’ And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

When Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said to his disciples, 'You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of man will be delivered up to be crucified.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 22:15-46; 23:1-39 15 Then the Pharisees went off and took counsel on how they might ensnare Jesus in his talk.
16 They sent their own disciples to Jesus, along with the Herodians, and asked,

'Teacher, we know that you are honest and that you teach the way of God in truth. You are not swayed by men because you pay no attention to who they are. 17 Tell us therefore, what do you think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?'
18 But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, 'Why do you test me, you hypocrites? 19 Show me the tax money.' They brought him a denarius.
20 Jesus asked them, 'Whose image and inscription is this?' 21 They answered, 'Caesar's.' Then he said to them, 'Give therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.' 22 When they heard this [reply], they were amazed, and leaving him, they went away. 23 On that [same] day, Sadducees (those who say that there is no resurrection,) came to him.
They asked him [a question], 24saying, 'Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies without having children, his brother shall marry his wife and have a posterity for his brother.'
25 Now there were with us seven brothers. The first married and died, and having no descendant he left his wife to his brother. 26 In the same way, the second also, and the third, to the seventh. 27 After them all, the woman also died.
28 In the resurrection therefore, which one of the seven brothers will have her as wife, for they all had her as wife?' 29 But Jesus answered them, 'You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures or the power of God.
30 For in the resurrection, peopled neither marry nor are given in marriage, but they are like angels a in heaven.
31 However, concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying: 32 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?' God is not the God of the dead,c but of the living!'
33 When the crowds heard it, they were astonished at his teaching.
34 But the Pharisees, when they heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, gathered together. 35 One of them, a lawyer, then asked him a question in order to test him. 36'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?'
37 Jesus said to him, ''You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38This is the first and great commandment.
39 The second is likewise, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40The entire law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.' 41
Now while the Pharisees were assembled, Jesus asked them a question, 42 saying, 'What do you think of the Messiah?g Whose son is he?' They answered, '[He is the son] of David.'
43 Jesus said to them, 'How, then, does David, in the Spirit, call him 'Lord,' saying: 'The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet?'
45 If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?' 46 No one was able to answer him a word, and from that day on, no one dared to ask him any more questions.
23 Woe on the Scribes and Pharisees Jesus then spoke to the crowds and to his disciples, 2 saying, 'The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses. 3

Therefore, whatever they tell you to observe, observe and do, but do not imitate their works; for they preach and [yet] do not act accordingly. 4 Indeed, they bind heavy burdens that are dreadful to bear and put them on people's shoulders; but they themselves will not lift a finger to help them. 5Instead, they do all their works to be seen by men.
They make their phylacteries broad, they enlarge the fringes 6 and love the place of honor at feasts. They love the best seats in the synagogues, 7the greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called 'Rabbi, ' by people.
8 But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for one is your teacher, the Christ, and all of you are brothers. 9
Call no man on the earth 'your father,' for one is your Father, he who is in heaven.
10 And do not be called 'teacher,' for one is your teacher, the Christ.
11 Instead, the one who is the greatest among you shall be your servant. 12 Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.
13 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and as a pretense you make long prayers. Therefore, you will receive a greater condemnation. 14 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you shut the Kingdom of Heaven in the face of people and you yourselves do not enter! And those who would enter, you prevent from doing so.
15 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel around by sea and land to make one convert; and when one is converted, you make him twice as much of an heir of Gehenna as yourselves. 16 Woe to you, you blind guides, who say, 'If someone swears by the sanctuary, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the sanctuary is bound.'
17 You blind fools! Which is greater, the gold, or the sanctuary that sanctifies the gold? 18You say, 'If someone swears by the altar, it is nothing; but if someone swears by the gift that is placed on it, he is bound!' 19 You blind men! Which is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifies the gift?
20 Therefore, whoever swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it.
21 Whoever swears by the sanctuary swears by it and by the one dwelling in it. 22 Whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by the one who sits on it.
23 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin, but you have not fulfilled the truly significant matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faith.
It is these you should have practice, without neglecting the others. 24 You are blind guides who filter out a fly and yet swallow a camel! 25 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the platter, but inside, they are full of greed and unrighteousness.
26 You blind Pharisees, first clean the inside of the cup and platter, so that the outside may also become clean. 27 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which appear beautiful on the

outside, but inside, they are full of dead bones and all [kinds of] impurity.
28Likewise, you also appear righteous to men in appearance, but inside, you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.
29 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the tombs of the righteous, 30 saying, ‘If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have partaken with them in the blood of the prophets.’
31 Therefore, you testify to yourselves that you are children of those who killed the prophets! 32 Fill up, then, the measure [of sin] of your forefathers. 33 You serpents, offspring of vipers, how will you escape the judgment of Gehennae?
34 Therefore, behold, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes. Some of them, you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from city to city. 35 Thus all the righteous blood shed on the earth will come upon you, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zachariah son of Barachiahf whom you killed between the sanctuary and the altar.
36 Amen, I tell you: all these things will come upon this generation.
37 Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often have I desired to gather your children, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings; but you were not willing! 38Behold, your house is left to you in a desolate state.
39 For I tell you, you will not see me from now on until [the day when] you are saying, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the Name of the Lord!’"

Day 12-Apr-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

St Isaac the Syrian, abbot of Spoleto, Italy (~550)

This is not the famed Isaac of Syria (commemorated Jan 28) who wrote the Ascetical Homilies, but a monk who settled in Spoleto and was famed for his holy, solitary life, his miracles, and his discernment. The people of Spoleto sought to honor him with money and other gifts, but he refused everything and withdrew to a cell in the forest. Soon a large monastery grew up there as others joined him in his life of prayer.

Once, two nearly naked men came begging clothing from Isaac. He told a monk to go to a hollow tree some distance away, and to bring back what he found there. The monk returned with some clothing, and gave it to the beggars. They were shamed to find that it was their own clothing, which they had hidden in the tree.

A man gave two beehives to the monastery. A monk hid one of them and brought the other to the abbot. Isaac said to him, 'Be careful when you go back to the beehive that you hid: it has been taken over by poisonous snakes. Be careful that they do not bite you.'

St Basil the Confessor, bishop of Parium (~760)

In the dark days of iconoclasm, this holy bishop refused to sign the imperial order condemning the veneration of icons, and for this was cruelly persecuted in many ways by the heretics for the remainder of his life; all the while he remained 'firm as a diamond in his Orthodoxy.' (Prologue)

Our Holy Mother Athanasia (860)

"Born on the island of Aegina of rich and eminent parents, she gave her goods to the poor and went off to a monastery, where she heaped greater and greater asceticism on herself. She took food only once a day, and that only bread and water, and in the Great Fast only once every two days. Only at Christmas and Easter did she taste flesh and oil. Although she was abbess of the monastery, she was the servant of all the other sisters and was ashamed that any should wait on her. She was made worthy of the great gift of wonderworking, both during her lifetime and after her death." (Prologue)

Venerable Anthusa of Constantinople

Saint Basil, Bishop of Riazan

Venerable Acacius of Kapsokalyvia

Hieromartyr Artemon of Laodicea

Day 12-Apr-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Matthew 26:6-16

Gospel Reading: Matthew 26:6-16
When Jesus was at Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment and she poured it on his head, as he sat at table.
But when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, 'Why this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for a large sum, and given to the poor.
But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, 'Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me.
For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me.
In pouring this ointment on my body she has done it to prepare me for burial.
Truly, I say to you wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.
Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What will you give me if I deliver him to you?' And they paid him thirty pieces of silver.
And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him.

Gospel Reading: John 12:17-50 At that time, the crowd that had been with Jesus when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead bore witness.
The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign.
The Pharisees then said to one another, 'You see that you can do nothing; look, the world has gone after him.
Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks.
So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.
Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew went with Philip and they told Jesus.
And Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified.
Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.
He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

If any one serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also; if any one serves me, the Father will honor him.
'Now is my soul troubled.
And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour.
Father, glorify your name.
Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.
The crowd standing by heard it and said that it had thundered.
Others said, 'An angel has spoken to him.
Jesus answered, 'This voice has come for your sake, not for mine.
Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.
He said this to show by what death he was to die.
The crowd answered him, 'We have heard from the law that the Christ remains for ever.
How can you say that the Son of man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of man?'
Jesus said to them, 'The light is with you for a little longer.
Walk while you have the light, lest the darkness overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes.
While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.
When Jesus had said this, he departed and hid himself from them.
Though he had done so many signs before them, yet they did not believe in him; it was that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: 'Lord, who has believed our report, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?'
Therefore they could not believe.
For Isaiah again said, 'He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they should see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and turn for me to heal them.
Isaiah said this because he saw his glory and spoke of him.
Nevertheless many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.
And Jesus cried out and said, 'He who believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me.
And he who sees me sees him who sent me.
I have come as light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.
If any one hears my sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.
He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day.
For I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak.

And I know that his commandment is eternal life.
What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has bidden me.

Day 13-Apr-2023 Thursday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Hieromartyr Artemon, presbyter of Laodicea in Syria (303)

At the time of Diocletian's persecutions, he was a very old man, having served as a reader for sixteen years, then a deacon for twenty-eight years, and finally as a priest for thirty years, for a total of seventy-four years. The pagan judge put him in the Temple of Aesculapius, where large snakes were kept and worshiped as gods. Though the judge meant for Artemon to be attacked by the snakes, the holy priest immobilized them with the sign of the Cross, brought them out of the temple and, in front of the pagan priests, breathed on the snakes, which died instantly. The chief priest, Vitalis, fell to his knees and cried 'Great is the Christian God!' Artemon baptised him along with several of his friends.

The unrepentant judge then condemned Artemon to be thrown into burning pitch, but the judge himself was thrown off his horse into the pitch and died. After this, Artemon went free for a time and spent his time teaching the Faith to his people ("accompanied always by two tame deer," says St Nikolia Velimirovic!). But he was arrested again and beheaded in the year 303.

St Martin the Confessor, pope of Rome (655)

"Martin became Pope on July 5th, 649, at the time of a furious quarrel between the Orthodox and the Monothelite heretics. Constans the Second, Heraclius' grandson, was on the throne at the time, and Paul was Patriarch of Constantinople. To restore peace in the Church, the Emperor himself wrote a dogmatic decree, the Typos, which leaned heavily towards heresy. Pope Martin summoned a Council of 105 bishops, at which the Emperor's statement was condemned. At the same time, the Pope wrote a letter to Patriarch Paul, begging him to uphold the purity of the Orthodox faith and to counsel the Emperor to reject the theories of the heretics. This letter infuriated both the Patriarch and the Emperor. The Emperor sent one of his generals, Olympius, to take the Pope to Constantinople in bonds. The general did not dare to bind the Pope with his own hands, but instructed one of his soldiers to kill him with the sword in church. But, when the soldier entered the church with his sword concealed, he was instantly blinded. So, by the providence of God, Martin escaped death. At that time, the Saracens fell upon Sicily, and Olympius went off there, where he died. Then, by the intrigues of the heretic Patriarch Paul, the Emperor sent a second general, Theodore, to bind and take the Pope on the charge that he, the Pope, was in collusion with the Saracens and that he did not reverence the most holy Mother of God. [!!] When the general arrived

in Rome and read the accusation against the Pope, he replied that it was a libel; that he had no contact of any sort with the Saracens, the opponents of Christianity, 'and whoever does not confess the most holy Mother of God and do her reverence, let him be damned in this age and in that which is to come.' But this did not affect the general's decision. The Pope was bound and taken to Constantinople, where he lay long in prison in great sickness, tortured by both anxiety and hunger, until he was finally sentenced to exile in Cherson, where he lived for two years before his death. He gave his soul into the hands of the Lord, for whom he had suffered so greatly, in 655. The evil Patriarch, Paul,ied two years before him and, when the Emperor visited him on his deathbed, he smote his head against the wall, confessing with tears that he had greatly sinned against Pope Martin and asking the Emperor to set Martin free.' (Prologue)

In some menaia he is commemorated on April 14.

Holy Martyrs Eleutherius the Persian, Theodosius and Zoilus the Roman

Day 13-Apr-2023 Thursday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 11:23-32; Matthew 26:1-20; John 13:3-17; Matthew 26:21-39; Luke 22:43-45; Matthew 26:40-27:2

The First Gospel

John 13:31-18:1 SO, WHEN HE HAD GONE OUT, Jesus said, Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him.
If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately.
Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer.
You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, 'Where I am going, you cannot come,' so now I say to you.
A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.
By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.
Simon Peter said to Him, Lord, where are You going? Jesus answered him, Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward.
Peter said to Him, Lord, why can I not follow You now? I will lay down my life for Your sake.
Jesus answered him, Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times.
Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.
In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.
And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.
And where I go you know, and the way you know.
Thomas said to Him, Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way? Jesus said to him, I am the way, the truth, and the life.
No one comes to the Father except through Me.
If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him.
Philip said to Him, Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.
Jesus said to him, Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The

words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works.
Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.
Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father.
And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.
If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.
If you love Me, keep My commandments.
And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever; the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.
I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.
A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me.
Because I live, you will live also.
At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.
He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me.
And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.
Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world? Jesus answered and said to him, If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.
He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me.
These things I have spoken to you while being present with you.
But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.
Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you.
Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.
You have heard Me say to you, 'I am going away and coming back to you.
If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, 'I am going to the Father,' for My Father is greater than I.
And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe.
I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me.
But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, so I do.
Arise, let us go from here.

I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.
Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.
You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.
Abide in Me, and I in you.
As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.
I am the vine, you are the branches.
He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.
If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.
If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.
By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.
As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.
If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.
These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.
This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.
Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.
You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.
No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.
You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.
These things I command you, that you love one another.
If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you.
If you were of the world, the world would love its own.
Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.
Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.
If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.
If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.
But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me.
If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin.
He who hates Me hates My Father also.
If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would have

no sin; but now they have seen and also hated both Me and My Father.
But this happened that the word might be fulfilled which is written in their law, 'They hated Me without a cause.
But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.
And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning.
These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble.
They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service.
And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me.
But these things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them.
And these things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you.
But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.
Nevertheless I tell you the truth.
It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.
And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.
I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.
However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.
He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.
All things that the Father has are Mine.
Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.
A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father.
Then some of His disciples said among themselves, What is this that He says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'; and, 'because I go to the Father'? They said therefore, What is this that He says, 'A little while'? We do not know what He is saying.
Now Jesus knew that they desired to ask Him, and He said to them, Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'? Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy.
A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as

soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world.
Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you.
And in that day you will ask Me nothing.
Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.
Until now you have asked nothing in My name.
Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.
These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father.
In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God.
I came forth from the Father and have come into the world.
Again, I leave the world and go to the Father.
His disciples said to Him, See, now You are speaking plainly, and using no figure of speech! Now we are sure that You know all things, and have no need that anyone should question You.
By this we believe that You came forth from God.
Jesus answered them, Do you now believe? Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone.
And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.
These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace.
In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.
Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: Father, the hour has come.
Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him.
And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.
I have glorified You on the earth.
I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.
And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.
I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world.
They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word.
Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You.
For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have

received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me.
I pray for them.
I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours.
And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them.
Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You.
Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are.
While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name.
Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.
But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves.
I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.
I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.
They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.
Sanctify them by Your truth.
Your word is truth.
As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.
And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.
I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.
And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.
Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.
O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me.
And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.
When Jesus had spoken these words, He went out with His disciples over the Brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which He and His disciples entered.
The Second Gospel

John 18:1-28

Jesus went out with His disciples over the Brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which He and His disciples entered.
And Judas, who betrayed Him, also knew the place; for Jesus often met there with His disciples.
Then Judas, having received a detachment of troops, and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons.
Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward and said to them, Whom are you seeking? They answered Him, Jesus of Nazareth.
Jesus said to them, I am He.
And Judas, who betrayed Him, also stood with them.
Now when He said to them, I am He, they drew back and fell to the ground.
Then He asked them again, Whom are you seeking? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth.
Jesus answered, I have told you that I am He.
Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way, that the saying might be fulfilled which He spoke, Of those whom You gave Me I have lost none.
Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear.
The servant's name was Malchus.
So Jesus said to Peter, Put your sword into the sheath.
Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me? Then the detachment of troops and the captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound Him.
And they led Him away to Annas first, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was high priest that year.
Now it was Caiaphas who advised the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.
And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple.
Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest.
But Peter stood at the door outside.
Then the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to her who kept the door, and brought Peter in.
Then the servant girl who kept the door said to Peter, You are not also one of this Man's disciples, are you? He said, I am not.

Now the servants and officers who had made a fire of coals stood there, for it was cold, and they warmed themselves.
And Peter stood with them and warmed himself.
The high priest then asked Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine.
Jesus answered him, I spoke openly to the world.
I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing.
Why do you ask Me? Ask those who have heard Me what I said to them.
Indeed they know what I said.
And when He had said these things, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Do You answer the high priest like that? Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me? Then Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.
Now Simon Peter stood and warmed himself.
Therefore they said to him, You are not also one of His disciples, are you? He denied it and said, I am not! One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of him whose ear Peter cut off, said, Did I not see you in the garden with Him? Peter then denied again; and immediately a rooster crowed.
Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning.
But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover.
The Third Gospel

Mat 26:57-7 5
The soldiers had laid hold of Jesus and led Him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled.
But Peter followed Him at a distance to the high priest's courtyard.
And he went in and sat with the servants to see the end.
Now the chief priests, the elders, and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none.
Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none.
But at last two false witnesses came forward and said, This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.
And the high priest arose and said to Him, Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You? But Jesus kept silent.
And the high priest answered and said to Him, I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God! Jesus said to him, It is as you said.
Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.
Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying, He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy!
What do you think? They answered and said, He is deserving of death.

Then they spat in His face and beat Him; and others struck Him with the palms of their hands, saying, Prophesy to us, Christ! Who is the one who struck You? Now Peter sat outside in the courtyard.
And a servant girl came to him, saying, You also were with Jesus of Galilee.
But he denied it before them all, saying, I do not know what you are saying.
And when he had gone out to the gateway, another girl saw him and said to those who were there, This fellow also was with Jesus of Nazareth.
But again he denied with an oath, I do not know the Man! And a little later those who stood by came up and said to Peter, Surely you also are one of them, for your speech betrays you.
Then he began to curse and swear, saying, I do not know the Man! Immediately a rooster crowed.
And Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.
So he went out and wept bitterly.
The Fourth Gospel

John 18:28-19:16

Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover.
Pilate then went out to them and said, What accusation do you bring against this Man?
They answered and said to him, If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you.
Then Pilate said to them, You take Him and judge Him according to your law.
Therefore the Jews said to him, It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death, that the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled which He spoke, signifying by what death He would die.
Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, Are You the King of the Jews? Jesus answered him, Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me? Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me.
What have You done? Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world.
If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.

Pilate therefore said to Him, Are You a king then? Jesus answered, You say rightly that I am a king.
For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth.
Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.
Pilate said to Him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, I find no fault in Him at all.
But you have a custom that I should release someone to you at the Passover.
Do you therefore want me to release to you the King of the Jews? Then they all cried again, saying, Not this Man, but Barabbas! Now Barabbas was a robber.
So then Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him.
And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe.
Then they said, Hail, King of the Jews! And they struck Him with their hands.
Pilate then went out again, and said to them, Behold, I am bringing Him out to you, that you may know that I find no fault in Him.
Then Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe.
And Pilate said to them, Behold the Man! Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, Crucify Him, crucify Him! Pilate said to them, You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him.
The Jews answered him, We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God.
Therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid, and went again into the Praetorium, and said to Jesus, Where are You from? But Jesus gave him no answer.
Then Pilate said to Him, Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You? Jesus answered, You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above.
Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.
From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend.
Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar.
When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha.
Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour.
And he said to the Jews, Behold your King! But they cried out, Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him! Pilate said to them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar! Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified.
So they took Jesus and led Him away.
The Fifth Gospel

Mat 27:3-32

Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.
And they said, What is that to us? You see to it! Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself.
But the chief priests took the silver pieces and said, It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, because they are the price of blood.
And they consulted together and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in.
Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.
Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the value of Him who was priced, whom they of the children of Israel priced, and gave them for the potter's field, as the LORD directed me.
Now Jesus stood before the governor.
And the governor asked Him, saying, Are You the King of the Jews? So Jesus said to him, It is as you say.
And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing.
Then Pilate said to Him, Do You not hear how many things they testify against You? But He answered him not one word, so that the governor marveled greatly.
Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to releasing to the multitude one prisoner whom they wished.
And at that time they had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas.
Therefore, when they had gathered together, Pilate said to them, Whom do you want me to release to you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ? For he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy.
While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him, saying, Have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him.
But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus.
The governor answered and said to them, Which of the two do you want me to release to you? They said, Barabbas! Pilate said to them, What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ? They all said to him, Let Him be crucified! Then the governor said, Why, what evil has He done? But they cried out all the more, saying, Let Him be crucified! When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just Person.
You see to it.
And all the people answered and said, His blood be on us and on our children.
Then he released Barabbas to them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified.

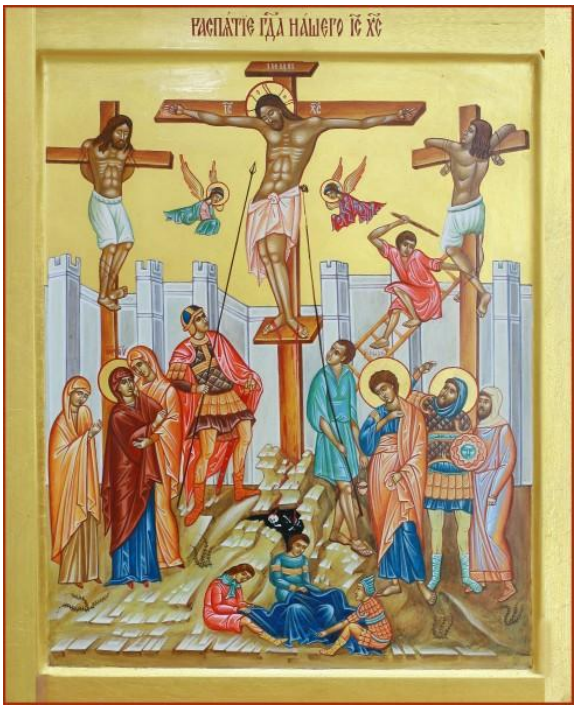
Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole garrison around Him.
And they stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him.
When they had twisted a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand.
And they bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! Then they spat on Him, and took the reed and struck Him on the head.
And when they had mocked Him, they took the robe off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him away to be crucified.
Now as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name.
Him they compelled to bear His cross.
The Sixth Gospel

Mark 15:16-32
Then the soldiers led Him away into the hall called Praetorium, and they called together the whole garrison.
And they clothed Him with purple; and they twisted a crown of thorns, put it on His head, and began to salute Him, Hail, King of the Jews! Then they struck Him on the head with a reed and spat on Him; and bowing the knee, they worshiped Him.
And when they had mocked Him, they took the purple off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him out to crucify Him.
Then they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross.
And they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull.
Then they gave Him wine mingled with myrrh to drink, but He did not take it.
And when they crucified Him, they divided His garments, casting lots for them to determine what every man should take.
Now it was the third hour, and they crucified Him.
And the inscription of His accusation was written above: THE KING OF THE JEWS.
With Him they also crucified two robbers, one on His right and the other on His left.
So the Scripture was fulfilled which says, And He was numbered with the transgressors.
And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, Aha! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself, and come down from the cross! Likewise the chief priests also, mocking among themselves with the scribes, said, He saved others; Himself He cannot save.
Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe.
The Seventh Gospel

Mat 27:33-54

When they had come to a place called Golgotha, that is to say, Place of a Skull, they gave Him sour wine mingled with gall to drink.
But when He had tasted it, He would not drink.
Then they crucified Him, and divided His garments, casting lots, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet: They divided My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots.
Sitting down, they kept watch over Him there.
And they put up over His head the accusation written against Him: this is Jesus the king of the Jews.
Then two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and another on the left.
And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.
Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; Himself He cannot save.
If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him.
He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.
Even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him with the same thing.
Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land.
And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is, My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Some of those who stood there, when they heard that, said, This Man is calling for Elijah!
Immediately one of them ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink.
The rest said, Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to save Him.
And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit.
Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.
So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God! The Eighth Gospel

Luke 23:32-49



There were also two others, criminals, led with Him to be put to death.
And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left.
Then Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.
And they divided His garments and cast lots.
And the people stood looking on.
But even the rulers with them sneered, saying, He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God.
The soldiers also mocked Him, coming and offering Him sour wine, and saying, If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself.
And an inscription also was written over Him in letters of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew: this is the king of the Jews.
Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.
But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.
Then he said to Jesus, Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.
And Jesus said to him, Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.
Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour.
Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two.
And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.
Having said this, He breathed His last.
So when the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous Man! And the whole crowd who came together to that sight, seeing what had been done, beat their breasts and returned.
But all His acquaintances, and the women who followed Him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.
The Ninth Gospel

John 19:25-37
Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary

the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene.
When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, Woman, behold your son! Then He said to the disciple, Behold your mother! And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.
After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, I thirst! Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth.
So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, It is finished! And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.
Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.
Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him.
But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs.
But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.
And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe.
For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, Not one of His bones shall be broken.
And again another Scripture says, They shall look on Him whom they pierced.
The Tenth Gospel

Mark 15:43-47

Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.
Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time.
So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph.
Then he bought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen.
And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb.
And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses observed where He was laid.
The Eleventh Gospel

John 19:38-42
After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him permission.
So he came and took the body of Jesus.
And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds.
Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury.
Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid.
So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews' Preparation Day, for the tomb was nearby.
The Twelfth Gospel

Mat 27:6 2-6 6
On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise.
Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead.
So the last deception will be worse than the first.
Pilate said to them, You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how.
So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard.

Day 14-Apr-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Apostles Aristarchus, Pudens and Trophimus of the Seventy

All three are mentioned by name by the Apostle Paul.

Aristarchus is mentioned in Acts 19:29, Colossians 4:10 and Philemon 24. He was bishop of Apamea in Syria; St Paul calls him 'my fellow-prisoner' and 'my fellow-laborer'.

Pudens is mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:21. He was a prominent Roman citizen who gave refuge to Christians; his house was first a place of refuge for the Apostles, then one of the first churches in Rome.

Trophimus is mentioned with Pudens in 2 Timothy 4:21, and in Acts 21:29, where we learn that he was from Ephesus. He accompanied the Apostle Paul on some of his missions.

All three, like St Paul, were beheaded during Nero's persecutions.

Holy Martyr Ardalion the Actor (3rd c.)

He was a comic actor whose specialty was an act which mocked the Christian martyrs. But during an especially fierce persecution under the Emperor Maximian, his heart was changed in an unknown way, and during one of his performances he called out to the crowd that he was a Christian and that they must not laugh. For this, Ardalion was arrested and tried, and died by torture, as the Prologue says, "playing the role of martyr in very truth and with honour."

Holy Martyr Thomais of Alexandria

Holy New Martyr Demetrius of the Peloponnese

Holy Martyrs Antony, John and Eustathius of Lithuania

Day 14-Apr-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Matthew 27:55-6 1
Epistle Reading: St.
Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians 5:6-8
BRETHREN, a little leaven leavens the whole lump.
Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened.
For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed.
Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.
(Galatians 3.
13-14) Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us – for it is written, 'Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree' – that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 27:6 2-6 6 Next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, 'Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.
Therefore order the sepulcher to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first.
Pilate said to them, 'You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can.
So they went and made the sepulcher secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.

The Lamentations
(1) In the grave they laid Thee,
O My Life and My Christ
And the armies of the Angels was so amazed,
As they sang the praise of Thy submissive love!

(2) O my sweet Lord Jesus
My salvation, my light
How art Thou now by a grave and its darkness hid?
How unspeakable the mystery of Thy Love!

(3) Gone the Light the world knew.
Gone the Light that was mine.
O my Jesus, Thou art all of my heart' desire;
So the Virgin spake lamenting at Thy grave.

(4) Who will give me water,
For the tears I must weep?
So the maiden wed to God cried with loud lament;
That for my sweet Jesus I may rightly mourn.

(5) All we call Thee blessed,
Theotokos, most pure.
And with faithful hearts we honour the burial
Suffered three days by Thy Son who is our God.

(6) How O life canst Thou die?
In a grave how canst dwell?
For the proud domain of death Thou destroyest now
And the dead of hades makest Thou to rise.

(7) Now we magnify Thee,
O Lord Jesus our King.
And we venerate Thy passion and burial,
For therewith hast Thou delivered us from death.

(1) Exodus 33:11-23; (2) Job 42:12-16; (3) Isaiah 52:13-54:1; 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:2; Matthew 27:1-38; Luke 23:39-43; Matthew 27:39-54; John 19:31-37; Matthew 27:55-6 1

Day 15-Apr-2023 Saturday

Fast Day ; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Holy Martyr Sabbas the Goth (372)

In the kingdom of Wallachia (in modern-day Romania) the Goths undertook a brutal persecution of Christians. A Gothic prince came to the village of Buzau and asked the villagers if any Christians lived there. They swore to him that there were none. At this, Sabbas came before the Prince and said 'Let no one swear an oath on my behalf. I am a Christian.' Touched by his courage, the prince let Sabbas go, saying 'This one can do neither harm nor good.'

The following year a priest named Sansal came to the village and celebrated Pascha with Sabbas (who was truly the only Christian there). When the pagans heard of this, they attacked Sabbas' house and seized both men. They dragged Sabbas naked through thorns, then tied both him and Sansal to trees and tried to make them eat meat offered to idols. Neither man would touch the sacrifices. The prince then sentenced Sabbas to death and gave him over to the soldiers. Sabbas walked to the place of execution joyfully, singing and praising God. Seeing his goodness, the soldiers tried to free him on the way, but Sabbas refused, telling them that it was their duty to carry out the prince's command.

The soldiers took him to a river, tied a rock to his neck and cast him into the waters, where he gave back his soul to God. Some Christians later recovered his body and gave it honorable burial. The saint was 31 years old at the time of his martyrdom. In the reign of the Emperor Valens, the Greek commander Ionnios Soranos found the Saint's body during a war against the Goths, and took it to Cappadocia.

Holy Martyr Crescens of Myra
Saint Leonidas, Bishop of Athens
Holy Martyrs Basilissa and Anastasia

Day 15-Apr-2023 Saturday

Fast Day ; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.
Readings of the day: Romans 6:3-11; Matthew 28:1-20
Strict Fast 1.
Genesis 1:1-13 In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth.
But the earth was unsightly and unfurnished and darkness was over the deep, and the Spirit of God moved over the water.
And God said, Let there be light, and there was light.
And God saw the light that it was good, and God divided between the light and the darkness.
And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night, and there was evening and there was morning, the first day.
And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the water, and let it be a division between water and water, and it was so.
And God made the firmament, and God divided between the water which was under the firmament and the water which was above the firmament.
And God called the firmament Heaven, and God saw that it was good, and there was evening and there was morning, the second day.
And God said, Let the water which is under the heaven be collected into one place, and let the dry land appear, and it was so.
And the water which was under the heaven was collected into its places, and the dry land appeared.
And God called the dry land Earth, and the gatherings of the waters he called Seas, and God saw that it was good.
And God said, Let the earth bring forth the herb of grass bearing seed according to its kind and according to its likeness, and the fruit-tree bearing fruit whose seed is in it, according to its kind on the earth, and it was so.
And the earth brought forth the herb of grass bearing seed according to its kind and according to its likeness, and the fruit tree bearing fruit whose seed is in it, according to its kind on the earth, and God saw that it was good.
And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.
2.
Isaiah 6 0:1-16 Shine, Shine, O Jerusalem, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.
Behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and there shall be gross darkness on the nations: but the Lord shall appear upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee.
And kings shall walk in thy light, and nations in thy brightness.

Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold thy children gathered: all thy sons have come from far, and thy daughters shall be borne on men's shoulders.
Then shalt thou see, and fear, and be amazed in thine heart; for the wealth of the sea shall come round to thee, and of nations and peoples; and herds of camels shall come to thee, and the camels of Midian and Ephah shall cover thee: all from Saba shall come bearing gold, and shall bring frankincense, and they shall publish the salvation of the Lord.
And all the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered, and the rams of Nebaioth shall come; and acceptable sacrifices shall be offered on my altar, and my house of prayer shall be glorified.
Who are these that fly as clouds, and as doves with young ones to me? The isles have waited for me, and the ships of Tarshish among the first, to bring thy children from afar, and their silver and their gold with them, and that for the sake of the holy name of the Lord, and because the Holy One of Israel is glorified.
And strangers shall build thy walls, and their kings shall wait upon thee: for by reason of my wrath I smote thee, and by reason of mercy I loved thee.
And thy gates shall be opened continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; to bring in to thee the power of the Gentiles, and their kings as captives.
For the nations and the kings which will not serve thee shall perish; and those nations shall be made utterly desolate.
And the glory of Lebanon shall come to thee, with the cypress, and pine, and cedar together, to glorify my holy place.
And the sons of them that afflicted thee, and of them that provoked thee, shall come to thee in fear; and thou shalt be called Zion, the city of the Holy One of Israel.
Because thou hast become desolate and hated, and there was no helper, therefore I will make thee a perpetual gladness, a joy of many generations.
And thou shalt suck the milk of the Gentiles, and shalt eat the wealth of kings: and shalt know that I am the Lord that saves thee and delivers thee, the Holy One of Israel.
3.
Exodus 12:1-11 The Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, This month shall be to you the beginning of months: it is the first to you among the months of the year.
Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying, On the tenth of this month let them take each man a lamb according to the houses of their families, every man a lamb for his household.
And if they be few in a household, so that there are not enough for the lamb, he shall take with himself his neighbor that lives near to him, as to the number of souls, every one according to that which suffices him shall make a reckoning for the lamb.
It shall be to you a lamb unblemished, a male of a year old: ye shall take it of the lambs and the kids.

And it shall be kept by you till the fourteenth of this month, and all the multitude of the congregation of the children of Israel shall kill it toward evening.
And they shall take of the blood, and shall put it on the two door-posts, and on the lintel, in the houses wherein they shall eat it.
And they shall eat the flesh in this night roast with fire, and they shall eat unleavened bread with bitter herbs.
Ye shall not eat of it raw nor sodden in water, but only roast with fire, the head with the feet and the appurtenances.
Nothing shall be left of it till the morning, and a bone of it ye shall not break; but that which is left of it till the morning ye shall burn with fire.
And thus shall ye eat it: your loins girded, and your sandals on your feet, and your staves in your hands, and ye shall eat it in haste.
It is a Passover to the Lord.
4.
Jonah 1:1- 4:11 The word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying
Rise, and go to Nineveh, the great city, and preach in it; for the cry of its wickedness is come up to me.
But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.
And he went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish: and he paid his fare, and went up into it, to sail with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.
And the Lord raised up a wind on the sea; and there was a great storm on the sea, and the ship was in danger of being broken.
And the sailors were alarmed, and cried every one to his god, and cast out the wares that were in the ship into the sea, that it might be lightened of them.
But Jonah was gone down into the hold of the ship, and was asleep, and snored.
And the shipmaster came to him, and said to him, Why snorest thou? Arise, and call upon thy God, that God may save us, and we perish not.
And each man said to his neighbor, Come, let us cast lots, and find out for whose sake this mischief is upon us.
So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.
And they said to him, Tell us what is thine occupation, and whence comest thou, and of what country and what people art thou? And he said to them, I am a servant of the Lord: and I worship the Lord God of heaven, who made the sea, and the dry land.
Then the men feared exceedingly, and said to him, What is this that thou hast done? for the men knew that he was fleeing from the face of the Lord, because he had told them.
And they said to him, What shall we do to thee, that the sea may be calm to us? for the sea rose and lifted its wave exceedingly.
And Jonah said to them, Take me up, and cast me into the sea, and the sea shall be calm to you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.
And the men tried hard to return to the land, and were not able: for the sea rose

and grew more and more tempestuous against them.
And they cried to the Lord, and said, Forbid it, Lord: let us not perish for the sake of this man's life, and bring not righteous blood upon us: for thou, Lord, hast done as thou wouldest.
So they took Jonah, and cast him out into the sea: and the sea ceased from its raging.
And the men feared the Lord very greatly, and offered a sacrifice to the Lord, and vowed vows.
Now the Lord had commanded a great whale to swallow up Jonah: and Jonah was in the belly of the whale three days and three nights.
And Jonah prayed to the Lord his God out of the belly of the whale, and said, I cried in my affliction to the Lord my God, and he hearkened to me, even to my cry out of the belly of hell: thou heardest my voice.
Thou didst cast me into the depths of the heart of the sea, and the floods compassed me: all thy billows and thy waves have passed upon me.
And I said, I am cast out of thy presence: shall I indeed look again toward thy holy temple? Water was poured around me to the soul: the lowest deep compassed me, my head went down to the clefts of the mountains; I went down into the earth, whose bars are the everlasting barriers: yet, O Lord my God, let my ruined life be restored.
When my soul was failing me, I remembered the Lord; and may my prayer come to thee into thy holy temple.
They that observe vanities and lies have forsaken their own mercy.
But I will sacrifice to thee with the voice of praise and thanksgiving: all that I have vowed I will pay to thee, the Lord of my salvation.
And the whale was commanded by the Lord, and it cast up Jonah on the dry land.
And the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, Rise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and preach in it according to the former preaching which I spoke to thee of.
And Jonah arose, and went to Nineveh, as the Lord had spoken.
Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city, of about three days' journey.
And Jonah began to enter into the city about a day's journey, and he proclaimed, and said, Yet three days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.
And the men of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.
And the word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from off his throne, and took off his raiment from him, and put on sackcloth, and sat on ashes.
And proclamation was made, and it was commanded in Nineveh by the king and by his great men, saying, Let not men, or cattle, or oxen, or sheep, taste any thing, nor feed, nor drink water.
So men and cattle were clothed with sackcloth, and cried earnestly to God: and they 6 turned every one from their evil way, and from the iniquity that was in their hands, saying, Who knows if God will repent, and turn from his fierce anger, and

so we shall not perish? And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil ways; and God repented of the evil which he had said he would do to them; and he did it not.
But Jonah was very deeply grieved, and he was confounded.
And he prayed to the Lord, and said, O Lord, were not these my words when I was yet in my land? Therefore I made haste to flee to Tarshish; because I knew that thou art merciful and compassionate, long-suffering, and abundant in kindness, and repentest of evil.
And now, Lord God , take my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.
And the Lord said to Jonah, Art thou very much grieved? And Jonah went out from the city, and sat over against the city; and he made for himself there a booth, and he sat under it, until he should perceive what would become of the city.
And the Lord God commanded a gourd, and it came up over the head of Jonah, to be a shadow over his head, to shade him from his discomforts: and Jonah rejoiced with great joy for the gourd.
And God commanded a worm the next morning, and it smote the gourd, and it withered away.
And it came to pass at the rising of the sun, that God commanded a burning east wind; and the sun smote on the head of Jonah, and he fainted, and despaired of his life, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.
And God said to Jonah, Art thou very much grieved for the gourd? And he said, I am very much grieved, even unto death.
And the Lord said, Thou hadst pity on the gourd, for which thou hast not suffered, neither didst thou rear it; which came up before night, and perished before another night: and shall not I spare Nineveh, the great city, in which dwell more than twelve myriads of human beings, who do not know their right hand from their left hand; and also much cattle? 5.
Joshua 5:10-15 The children of Israel encamped at Gilgal, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, to the westward of Jericho on the opposite side of the Jordan in the plain.
And they ate of the grain of the earth unleavened and new corn.
In this day the manna failed, after they had eaten of the corn of the land, and the children of Israel no longer had manna: and they took the fruits of the land of Phoenicians in that year.
And it came to pass when Joshua was in Jericho, that he looked up with his eyes and saw a man standing before him, and there was a drawn sword in his hand; and Joshua drew near and said to him, Art thou for us or on the side of our enemies? And he said to him, I am now come, the chief captain of the host of the Lord.
And Joshua fell on his face upon the earth, and said to him, Lord, what commandest thou thy servant? And the chief captain of the host of the Lord said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy.

And Joshua did so.
6 .
Exodus 13:20 – 15:19 The children of Israel departed from Succoth, and encamped in Etham by the wilderness.
And God led them, in the day by a pillar of cloud, to show them the way, and in the night by a pillar of fire.
And the pillar of cloud failed not by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, before all the people.
And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the children of Israel, and let them turn and encamp before the village, between Migdol and the sea, opposite Baal-Zemphon: before them shalt thou encamp by the sea.
And Pharaoh will say to his people, As for these children of Israel, they are wandering in the land, for the wilderness has shut them in.
And I will harden the heart of Pharaoh, and he shall pursue after them; and I will be glorified in Pharaoh, and in all his host, and all the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord.
And they did so.
And it was reported to the king of the Egyptians that the people had fled: and the heart of Pharaoh was turned, and that of his servants against the people; and they said, What is this that we have done, to let the children of Israel go, so that they should not serve us? So Pharaoh yoked his chariots, and led off all his people with himself: having also taken six hundred chosen chariots, and all the cavalry of the Egyptians, and rulers over all.
And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and of his servants, and he pursued after the children of Israel; and the children of Israel went forth with a high hand.
And the Egyptians pursued after them, and found them encamped by the sea; and all the cavalry and the chariots of Pharaoh, and the horsemen, and his host were before the village, over against Baal-Zemphon.
And Pharaoh approached, and the children of Israel having looked up, beheld, and the Egyptians encamped behind them: and they were very greatly terrified, and the children of Israel cried to the Lord; and said to Moses, Because there were no graves in the land of Egypt, has thou brought us forth to slay us in the wilderness? What is this that thou hast done to us, having brought us out of Egypt? Is not this the word which we spoke to thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians? for it is better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in this wilderness.
And Moses said to the people, Be of good courage: stand and see the salvation which is from the Lord, which he will work for us this day; for as ye have seen the Egyptians to-day, ye shall see them again no more for ever.
The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.
And the Lord said to Moses, Why criest thou to me? speak to the children of Israel, and let them proceed.

And do thou lift up thy rod, and stretch forth thy hand over the sea and divide it, and let the children of Israel enter into the midst of the sea on the dry land.
And lo! I will harden the heart of Pharaoh and of all the Egyptians, and they shall go in after them; and I will be glorified upon Pharaoh, and on all his host, and on his chariots and his horses.
And all the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I am glorified upon Pharaoh and upon his chariots and his horses.
And the angel of God that went before the camp of the children of Israel removed and went behind, and the pillar of the cloud also removed from before them and stood behind them.
And it went between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel, and stood; and there was darkness and blackness; and the night passed, and they came not near to one another during the whole night.
And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the Lord carried back the sea with a strong south wind all the night, and made the sea dry, and the water was divided.
And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry land, and the water of it was a wall on the right hand and a wall on the left.
And the Egyptians pursued them and went in after them, and every horse of Pharaoh, and his chariots, and his horsemen, into the midst of the sea.
And it came to pass in the morning watch that the Lord looked forth on the camp of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud, and troubled the camp of the Egyptians, and bound the axletrees of their chariots, and caused them to go with difficulty; and the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel, for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians.
And the Lord said to Moses, Stretch forth thine hand over the sea, and let the water be turned back to its place, and let it cover the Egyptians coming both upon the chariots and the riders.
And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the water returned to its place toward day; and the Egyptians fled from the water, and the Lord shook off the Egyptians in the midst of the sea.
and the water returned and covered the chariots and the riders, and all the forces of Pharaoh, who entered after them into the sea: and there was not left of them even one.
But the children of Israel went along dry land in the midst of the sea, and the water was to them a wall on the right hand, and a wall on the left.
So the Lord delivered Israel in that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead by the shore of the sea.
And Israel saw the mighty hand, the things which the Lord did to the Egyptians; and the people feared the Lord, and they believed God and Moses his servant.
7 .
Zephaniah 3:8-15 Thus saith the Lord: wait upon me until the day when I rise up for a witness: because my judgment shall be on the gatherings of the nations, to

draw to me kings, to pour out upon them all my fierce anger: for the whole earth shall be consumed with the fire of my jealousy.
For then will I turn to the peoples a tongue for her generation, that all may call on the name of the Lord, to serve him under one yoke.
From the boundaries of the rivers of Ethiopia will I receive my dispersed ones; they shall offer sacrifices to me.
In that day thou shalt not be ashamed of all thy practices, wherein thou hast transgressed against me: for then will I take away from thee thy disdainful pride, and thou shalt no more magnify thyself upon my holy mountain.
And I will leave in thee a meek and lowly people; and the remnant of Israel shall fear the name of the Lord, and shall do no iniquity, neither shall they speak vanity; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed, and lie down, and there shall be none to terrify them.
Rejoice, O daughter of Zion; cry aloud , O daughter of Jerusalem; rejoice and delight thyself with all thine heart, O daughter of Jerusalem.
The Lord has taken away thine iniquities, he has ransomed thee from the hand of thine enemies: the Lord, the King of Israel, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more.
8 .
Third (First, according to the KJV) Kings 17:8-24 The word of the Lord came to Elijah, saying, Arise, and go to Zarephath of the Sidonian land: behold, I have there commanded a widow-woman to maintain thee.
And he arose and went to Zarephath, and came to the gate of the city; and, behold, a widow-woman was there gathering sticks; and Elijah cried after her, and said to her, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.
And she went to fetch it; and Elijah cried after her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of the bread that is in thy hand.
And the woman said, As the Lord thy God lives, I have not a cake, but only a handful of meal in the pitcher, and a little oil in a cruse, and, behold, I am going to gather two sticks, and I shall go in and dress it for myself and my children, and we shall eat it and die.
And Elijah said to her, Be of good courage, go in and do according to thy word; but make me thereof a little cake, and thou shalt bring it out to me first, and thou shalt make some for thyself and thy children last.
For thus saith the Lord, The pitcher of meal shall not fail, and the cruse of oil shall not diminish, until the day that the Lord gives rain upon the earth.
And the woman went and did so, and did eat, she, and he, and her children.
And the pitcher of meal failed not, and the cruse of oil was not diminished, according to the word of the Lord which he spoke by the hand of Elijah.
And it came to pass afterward, that the son of the woman the mistress of the house was sick; and his sickness was very severe, until there was no breath left in him.
And she said to Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O man of God? hast thou

come in to me to bring my sins to remembrance, and to slay my son? And Elijah said to the woman, Give me thy son.
And he took him out of her bosom, and took him up to the chamber in which he himself lodged, and laid him on the bed.
And Elijah cried aloud, and said, Alas, O Lord, the witness of the widow with whom I sojourn, thou hast wrought evil for her in slaying her son.
And he breathed on the child thrice, and called on the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, let, I pray thee, the soul of this child return to him.
And it was so, and the child cried out, and he brought him down from the upper chamber into the house, and gave him to his mother; and Elijah said, See, thy son lives.
And the woman said to Elijah, Behold, I know that thou art a man of God, and the word of the Lord in thy mouth is true.
9 .
Isaiah 6 1:10 – 6 2:5 Let my soul rejoice in the Lord; for He hath clothed me in the garment of salvation, and with the vesture of gladness hath He covered me: he hath placed a crown upon me as on a bridegroom, and He hath adorned me as a bride with comeliness.
And as the earth putting forth her flowers, and as a garden its seed; so shall the Lord, even the Lord, cause righteousness to spring forth, and exultation before all nations.
For Zion's sake I will not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her righteousness go forth as light, and my salvation burn as a torch.
And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and kings thy glory: and one shall call thee by a new name, which the Lord shall name.
And thou shalt be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God.
And thou shalt no more be called Forsaken; and thy land shall no more be called Desert: for thou shalt be called My Pleasure, and thy land Inhabited: for the Lord has taken pleasure in thee, and thy land shall be inhabited.
And as a young man lives with a virgin, so shall thy sons dwell in thee: and it shall come to pass that as a bridegroom will rejoice over a bride, so will the Lord rejoice over thee.
10 .
Genesis 22:1-18 It came to pass after these things that God tempted Abraham, and said to him, Abraham, Abraham; and he said, Lo! here am I.
And he said, Take thy son, the beloved one, whom thou hast loved-- Isaac, and go into the high land, and offer him there for a whole-burnt-offering on one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.
And Abraham rose up in the morning and saddled his ass, and he took with him two servants, and Isaac his son, and having split wood for a whole-burnt-offering, he arose and departed, and came to the place of which God spoke to him, on the third day; and Abraham having lifted up his eyes, saw the place afar off.

And Abraham said to his servants, Sit ye here with the ass, and I and the lad will proceed thus far, and having worshipped we will return to you.
And Abraham took the wood of the whole-burnt-offering, and laid it on Isaac his son, and he took into his hands both the fire and the knife, and the two went together.
And Isaac said to Abraham his father, 'Father'.
And he said, 'What is it, son?' And he said, 'Behold the fire and the wood, where is the sheep for a whole-burnt-offering?' And Abraham said, 'God will provide himself a sheep for a whole-burnt-offering, my son.
And both having gone together, came to the place which God spoke of to him and there Abraham built the altar and laid the wood on it, and having bound the feet of Isaac his son together, he laid him on the altar upon the wood.
And Abraham stretched forth his hand to take the knife to slay his son.
And an angel of the Lord called him out of heaven, and said 'Abraham, Abraham.
And he said, 'Behold, here am I.
And he said, 'Lay not thine hand upon the child, neither do anything to him, for now I know that thou fearest God, and for my sake thou hast not spared thy beloved son.
And Abraham lifted up his eyes and beheld, and lo! a ram caught by his horns in a thicket; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a whole-burnt-offering in the place of Isaac his son.
And Abraham called the name of that place, The Lord hath seen; that they might say to-day, In the mount the Lord was seen.
And an angel of the Lord called Abraham the second time out of heaven, saying, I have sworn by myself, says the Lord, because thou hast done this thing, and on my account hast not spared thy beloved son, surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is by the shore of the sea, and thy seed shall inherit the cities of their enemies.
And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because thou hast hearkened to my voice.
11 .
Isaiah 6 1:1-9 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me; he has sent me to preach glad tidings to the poor, to heal the broken in heart, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind; to declare the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of recompense; to comfort all that mourn; that there should be given to them that mourn in Zion glory instead of ashes, the oil of joy to the mourners, the garment of glory for the spirit of heaviness: and they shall be called generations of righteousness, the planting of the Lord for glory.
And they shall build the old waste places, they shall raise up those that were before made desolate, and shall renew the desert cities, even those that had been desolate for many generations.
And strangers shall come and feed thy flocks, and aliens shall be thy ploughmen and vine-dressers.

But ye shall be called priests of the Lord, the ministers of God: ye shall eat the strength of nations, and shall be admired because of their wealth.
Thus shall they inherit the land a second time, and everlasting joy shall be upon their head.
For I am the Lord who love righteousness, and hate robberies of injustice; and I will give their labor to the just, and will make an everlasting covenant with them.
And their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring in the midst of peoples: every one that sees them shall take notice of them, that they are a seed blessed of God; 12 .
Fourth (Second, according to the KJV) Kings 4:8-37 A day came, when Elisha passed over to Shunem, and there was a great lady there, and she constrained him to eat bread: and it came to pass as often as he went into the city, that he turned aside to eat there.
And the woman said to her husband, See now, I know that this is a holy man of God who comes over continually to us.
Let us now make for him an upper chamber, a small place; and let us put there for him a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall come to pass that when he comes in to us, he shall turn in thither.
And a day came, and he went in thither, and turned aside into the upper chamber, and lay there.
And he said to Gehazi his servant, Call me this Shunammite.
and he called her, and she stood before him.
And he said to him, Say now to her, Behold, thou hast taken all this trouble for us; what should I do for thee? Hast thou any request to make to the king, or to the captain of the host? And she said, I dwell in the midst of my people.
And he said to Gehazi, What must we do for her? and Gehazi his servant said, Indeed she has no son, and her husband is old.
And he called her, and she stood by the door.
And Elisha said to her, At this time next year, as the season is, thou shalt be alive, and embrace a son.
And she said, Nay, my lord, do not lie to thy servant.
And the woman conceived, and bore a son at the very time, as the season was, being alive, as Elisha said to her.
And the child grew: and it came to pass when he went out to his father to the reapers, that he said to his father, My head, my head.
and his father said to a servant, carry him to his mother.
And he carried him to his mother, and he lay upon her knees till noon, and died.
And she carried him up and laid him on the bed of the man of God; and she shut the door upon him, and went out.
And she called her husband, and said, Send now for me one of the young men, and one of the asses, and I will ride quickly to the man of God, and return.
And he said, Why art thou going to him to-day? It is neither new moon, nor the Sabbath.

And she said, It is well.
And she saddled the ass, and said to her servant, Be quick, proceed: spare not on my account to ride, unless I shall tell thee.
Go, and thou shalt proceed, and come to the man of God to mount Carmel.
And she rode and came to the man of God to the mountain: and it came to pass when Elisha saw her coming, that he said to Gehazi his servant, See now, that Shunammite comes.
Now run to meet her, and thou shalt say, Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child? and she said, It is well.
And she came to Elisha to the mountain, and laid hold of his feet; and Gehazi drew near to thrust her away.
And Elisha said, Let her alone, for her soul is much grieved in her, and the Lord has hidden it from me, and has not told it me.
And she said, Did I ask a son of my lord? For did I not say, Do not deal deceitfully with me? And Elisha said to Gehazi, Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thy hand, and go: if thou meet any man, thou shalt not salute him, and if a man salute thee thou shalt not answer him: and thou shalt lay my staff on the child's face.
And the mother of the child said, As the Lord lives and as thy soul lives, I will not leave thee.
And Elisha arose, and went after her.
And Gehazi went on before her, and laid his staff on the child's face: but there was neither voice nor any hearing.
So he returned to meet him, and told him, saying, The child is not awaked.
And Elisha went into the house, and, behold, the dead child was laid upon his bed.
And Elisha went into the house, and shut the door upon themselves, the two, and prayed to the Lord.
And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands; and bowed himself upon him, and the flesh of the child grew warm.
And he returned and walked up and down in the house: and he went up, and bowed himself on the child seven times; and the child opened his eyes.
And Elisha cried out to Gehazi, and said, Call this Shunammite.
So he called her, and she came in to him: and Elisha said, Take thy son.
And the woman went in, and fell at his feet, and did obeisance bowing to the ground; and she took her son, and went out.
13 .
Isaiah 6 3:11 – 6 4:5 Thus saith the Lord: Where is he that brought up from the sea the shepherd of the sheep? where is he that put his Holy Spirit in them? who led Moses with his right hand, the arm of his glory? he forced the water to separate from before him to make himself an everlasting name.
He led them through the deep, as a horse through the wilderness, and they fainted not, and as cattle through a plain: the Spirit came down from the Lord and guided them: thus thou leddest thy people, to make thyself a glorious name.

Turn from heaven, and look from thy holy habitation and from thy glory: where is thy zeal and thy strength? where is the abundance of thy mercy and of thy compassions, that thou hast withholden thyself from us? For thou art our Father; for though Abraham knew us not, and Israel did not acknowledge us, yet do thou, O Lord, our Father, deliver us: thy name has been upon us from the beginning. Why hast thou caused us to err, O Lord, from thy way? and has hardened our hearts, that we should not fear thee? Return for thy servants' sake, for the sake of the tribes of thine inheritance, that we may inherit a small part of thy holy mountain.
We are become as at the beginning, when thou didst not rule over us, and thy name was not called upon us.
If thou wouldest open the heaven, trembling will take hold upon the mountains from thee, and they shall melt, as wax melts before the fire; and fire shall burn up the enemies, and thy name shall be manifest among the adversaries: at thy presence the nations shall be troubled, whenever thou shalt work gloriously; trembling from thee shall take hold upon the mountains.
From of old we have not heard, neither have our eyes seen a God beside thee, and thy works which thou wilt perform to them that wait for mercy.
For these blessings shall happen to them that work righteousness, and they shall remember thy ways.
14 .
Jeremiah 31:31-34 Thus saith the Lord: Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.
And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.
15 .
Daniel 3:1-8 8 In his eighteenth year Nebuchadnezzar the king made a golden image, its height was sixty cubits, its breadth six cubits: and he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.
And he sent forth to gather the governors, and the captains, and the heads of provinces, chiefs, and princes, and those who were in authority, and all the rulers of districts, to come to the dedication of the image.
So the heads of provinces, the governors, the captains, the chiefs, the great princes, those who were in authority, and all the rulers of districts, were gathered to the dedication of the image which king Nebuchadnezzar had set up; and they

stood before the image.
Then a herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, ye peoples, tribes, and languages, at what hour ye shall hear the sound of the trumpet, and pipe, and harp, and sackbut, and psaltery , and every kind of music, ye shall fall down and worship the golden image which king Nebuchadnezzar has set up.
And whosoever shall not fall down and worship, in the same hour he shall be cast into the burning fiery furnace.
And it came to pass when the nations heard the sound of the trumpet, and pipe, and harp, and sackbut, and psaltery, and all kinds of music, all the nations, tribes, and languages, fell down and worshipped the golden image which king Nebuchadnezzar had set up.
Then came near certain Chaldeans, and accused the Jews to the king, saying, O king, live for ever.
Thou, O king, hast made a decree that every man who shall hear the sound of the trumpet, and pipe, and harp, sackbut, and psaltery, and all kinds of music, and shall not fall down and worship the golden image, shall be cast into the burning fiery furnace.
There are certain Jews whom thou hast appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who have not obeyed thy decree, O king: they serve not thy gods, and worship not the golden image which thou hast set up.
Then Nebuchadnezzar in wrath and anger commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: and they were brought before the king.
And Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that ye serve not my gods, and worship not the golden image which I have set up? Now then if ye be ready, whensoever ye shall hear the sound of the trumpet, and pipe, and harp, and sackbut, and psaltery, and harmony, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the golden image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, in the same hour ye shall be cast into the burning fiery furnace; and who is the God that shall deliver you out of my hand? Then answered Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and said to king Nebuchadnezzar, We have no need to answer thee concerning this matter.
For our God whom we serve is in the heavens, able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will rescue us from thy hands, O king.
But if not, be it known to thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the image which thou hast set up.
Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with wrath, and the form of his countenance was changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: and he gave orders to heat the furnace seven times more than usual, until it should burn to the uttermost.
And he commanded mighty men to bind Shadrach, Meshach, 20 and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace.
Then those men were bound with their coats, and caps, and hose, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace, forasmuch as the king's word prevailed;

and the furnace was made exceeding hot.
Then these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the midst of the burning furnace, and walked in the midst of the flame, singing praise to God, and blessing the Lord.
Then Azariah stood and offered this prayer; in the midst of the fire he opened his mouth and said: "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, God of our fathers, and worthy of praise; and Thy name is glorified for ever.
For Thou art just in all that Thou hast done to us, and all Thy works are true and Thy ways right, and all Thy judgments are truth.
Thou hast executed true judgments in all that Thou hast brought upon us and upon Jerusalem, the holy city of our fathers, for in truth and justice Thou hast brought all this upon us because of our sins.
For we have sinfully and lawlessly departed from Thee, and have sinned in all things and have not obeyed Thy commandments; we have not observed them or done them, as Thou hast commanded us that it might go well with us.
So all that Thou hast brought upon us, and all that Thou hast done to us, Thou hast done in true judgment.
Thou hast given us into the hands of lawless enemies, most hateful rebels, and to an unjust king, the most wicked in all the world.
And now we cannot open our mouths; shame and disgrace have befallen Thy servants and worshippers.
For Thy name's sake do not give us up utterly, and do not break Thy covenant, and do not withdraw Thy mercy from us, for the sake of Abraham Thy beloved and for the sake of Isaac Thy servant and Israel Thy holy one, to whom Thou didst promise to make their descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as the sand on the shore of the sea.
For we, O Lord, have become fewer than any nation, and are brought low this day in all the world because of our sins.
And at this time there is no prince, or prophet, or leader, no burnt offering, or sacrifice, or oblation, or incense, no place to make an offering before Thee or to find mercy.
Yet with a contrite heart and a humble spirit may we be accepted, as though it were with burnt offerings of rams and bulls, and with tens of thousands of fat lambs; such may our sacrifice be in Thy sight this day, and may we wholly follow Thee, for there will be no shame for those who trust in Thee.
And now with all our heart we follow Thee, we fear Thee and seek Thy face.
Do not put us to shame, but deal with us in Thy forbearance and in Thine abundant mercy.
Deliver us in accordance with Thy marvelous works, and give glory to Thy name, O Lord! Let all who do harm to Thy servants be put to shame; let them be disgraced and deprived of all power and dominion, and let their strength be broken.
Let them know that Thou art the Lord, the only God, glorious over the whole world.
" Now the king's servants who threw them in did not cease feeding the furnace

fires with naphtha, pitch, tow, and brush.
And the flame streamed out above the furnace forty nine cubits, and it broke through and burned those of the Chaldeans whom it caught about in the furnace.
But the angel of the Lord came down into the furnace to be with Azariah and his companions, and drove the fiery flame out of the furnace, and made the midst of the furnace like a moist whistling wind, so that the fire did not touch them at all or hurt or trouble them.
Then the three, as with one mouth, praised and glorified and 21 blessed God in the furnace, saying: "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, God of our fathers, and supremely praised and supremely exalted unto the ages; And blessed is Thy glorious, holy name, which is supremely praised and supremely exalted unto the ages; Blessed art Thou in the temple of Thy holy glory, Thou who art supremely praised and supremely exalted unto the ages.
Blessed art Thou, who sittest upon cherubim and lookest upon the abysses, Thou who art supremely praised and supremely exalted unto the ages.
Blessed art Thou upon the throne of Thy kingdom, Thou Who art supremely praised and supremely exalted unto the ages.
Blessed art Thou in the firmament of the heaven, Thou Who art supremely praised and supremely exalted unto the ages: Epistle Reading: St.
Paul's Letter to the Romans 6:3-11 Brethren, all who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death.
We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.
For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His.
We know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin.
For he who has died is freed from sin.
But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.
For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over Him.
The death He died He died to sin, once for all, but the life He lives He lives to God.
So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 28:1-20 After the sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the sepulcher.
And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone, and sat upon it.
His appearance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow.
And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men.
But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid; for I know that you seek Jesus

who was crucified.
He is not here; for he has risen, as he said.
Come, see the place where he lay.
Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him.
Lo, I have told you.
So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.
And behold, Jesus met them and said, 'Hail! ' And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him.
Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.
While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place.
And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sum of money to the soldiers and said, 'Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.
And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.
So they took the money and did as they were directed; and this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.
Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.
And when they saw him they worshiped him; but some doubted.
And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.
Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.
Amen.

Day 16-Apr-2023 Sunday

Pascha, Fast Free

Virgin Martyrs Agape, Irene, and Chionia in Illyria (295 or 304)

These three sisters lived in Aquilea. When the Emperor Diocletian was visiting there, he learned that they were Christians and had them brought to him. When they would not deny Christ, they were cast into prison, then handed over to a general named Dulcitius for torture. Dulcitius conceived a passion for the sisters, and entered the prison planning to defile them; but when he tried to enter, he was deprived of his reason and fell upon the dirty pots at the entrance, embracing and kissing them until he was completely black with soot. Hearing of this, the Emperor appointed another general to torment the sisters. After terrible tortures Agape and Chionia were burned, but the sadistic general, knowing her pledge of virginity to the Lord, ordered Irene to be put in a brothel. By God's providence she was shot with an arrow before she could be forced to endure this fate.

So ends the version given in the Great Horologion. The Prologue gives a slightly different version: When Irene was being led to the brothel, an angel turned the soldiers back and led Irene to the top of a high hill. The next day the general came with his soldiers to capture her, but were unable to climb it. The general then ordered that Irene be shot with arrows.

St Anastasia, a prophetess in that town, gathered the bodies of all three sisters and gave them burial.

Holy Martyrs Leonidas, Charissa, Nice and Companions

Holy New Martyr Michael of Bourla

Day 16-Apr-2023 Sunday

Pascha, Fast Free

HOLY PASCHA
Acts 1:1-8; John 1:1-17
Epistle Reading: Acts of the Apostles 1:1-8
In the first book, O Theophilos, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.
To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God.
And while staying with them he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, 'you heard from me, for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.
So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom of Israel?' He said to them, 'it is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority.
But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.

Gospel Reading: John 1:1-17

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.
In him was life, and the life was the light of men.
The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.
He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him.
He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light.
The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world.
He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not.

He came to his own home, and his own people received him not.
But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.
And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.
(John bore witness to him, and cried, 'This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, for he was before me.')
And from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace.
For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

SERMON ON THE HOLY PASCHA

Jesus is risen from the dead! He is God, he is glorified! His light and his warmth give life to the whole universe, and not only mortal life, because he shares his imperishable life with his entire creation. Saint John’s Gospel calls Jesus the word. Today’s Gospel starts with the phrase we all know, In the beginning was the word. When we were small children, we heard the words our parents spoke, and their words became our words. We began to think, to speak and to relate to people, thanks to the words we inherited from others.
In an even more powerful way, Jesus is the word in our lives. Deep inside the heart of each person Jesus is the source of our ability to think and speak to others. Jesus makes persons of all of us.
Jesus is the Word of God because he is the full revelation of God to us. He is also the Giver of our ability to think and speak and relate to one another.
This is the image of God in us. Jesus also enables us to see every human being as the image of God. Left to our own devices, we see the limitations of people. Our faith in Jesus makes us hope fervently that one day every human being will be joyfully transfigured by the glory of God. Jesus takes the scales off our eyes if we make the effort to obey him. Learning about God through doing his will started long before Jesus was born.
When God was giving his commandments to the Jewish people at Mount Sinai, in the days of Moses, the people exclaimed, ‘we will do the commandments so that we may hear them’ (Exod. 24: 7). We can only understand God’s commandments by doing his will.
The Apostle James, the Brother of the Lord teaches this clearly, ‘be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves’ (Jam. 1: 22).

The Saviour himself tells us, ‘Why do you not do what I tell you? I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them. That one is like a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against it, immediately it fell, and great was the ruin of that house’ (Luk. 6: 46-49)
Let me give two examples from the Gospel. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus pointed out to us that we are not to label people.
God sees how each person lives, he alone can judge a person. Someone’s religious label might not be a safe understanding of who they really are.
In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord commands us not to pray or help others so as to be seen and admired, but do it secretly, and always forgive others, because it is the condition for our being forgiven.
In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus is telling us that wealth and power mean nothing, and that someone who is deprived of all good things in life may well be on his way to the greatest glory in God’s Kingdom.
God has huge surprises in store for everyone. Being a Christian is never achieved by conforming to fashionable ideas.
Only the truth of Christ is eternal. The Kingdom of God is always a contrast, a joyful shock, when compared with the latest popular enthusiasm. God will surprise and astound us when we arrive in heaven.
He will go on surprising us and astounding us every day throughout eternity.
Amen.

Day 17-Apr-2023 Monday

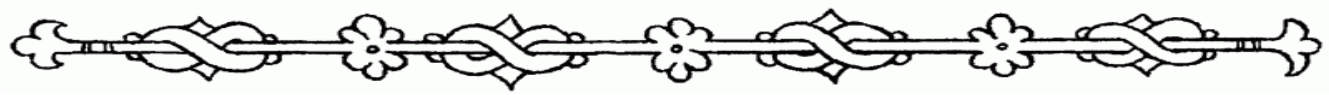
Renewal Monday; Fast Free

Hieromartyr Simeon, Bishop in Persia, and those with him (343)

The Holy Symeon was bishop of the royal cities of Seleucia and Ctesiphon in Persia, during a great persecution under King Sapor II. The king had been incited by (Zoroastrian) Magi jealous of the growth of the Faith in their territory, and by some Jews living in Persia. The king was already displeased with the holy bishop: his eunuch, Ustazan, a secret Christian, had denied Christ, but when reprimanded by Symeon, had confessed the Faith before the King, for which he was executed. On Holy Friday of 343 Symeon, along with at least a hundred other servants of the Church, was sent out to be slain. Symeon exhorted each to be of good courage, and was himself slain last. One year later, again on Holy Friday, the King's eunuch Azat was executed for Christ, along with a great number of the faithful. It is said that more than 1,000 Christians died as martyrs during this persecution.

The Zoroastrians still live in parts of Iran as a small, somewhat persecuted minority under the Islamic government.

Saint Acacius, Bishop of Melitene
Saint Agapitus, Pope of Rome
Makarious, Bishop of Corinth
Venerable Sabbatius and Zosimas
Venerable Paisius, Fool-for-Christ of Kiev



Day 17-Apr-2023 Monday

Renewal Monday; Fast Free
Readings of the day: Acts 1:12-17; 21-26; John 1:18-28
12 Then, they returned to Jerusalem from the mountain called Olivet, which is near
Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away 13 After entering the city, they went up
into the upper room where they were staying; that is Peter, John, James, Andrew,
Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James [the son] of Alphaeus, Simon the
Zealot, and Judas [the son]a of James.
14 With one accord, all these were continuing steadfastly in prayer , together with
certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus and his brothers.
b 15 In those days, Peter stood up among the disciples (and the number of names
was about one hundred twenty) and said: 16 'Brethren, it was necessary that this
Scripture should be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit had spoken beforehand by the
mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested
Jesus.
17 For he was numbered with us and received his portion in this ministry.
21Therefore, of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord
Jesus went in and out among us, 22 beginning from the baptism of John and to the
day that he was taken up from us, of these [men], one must become a witness with
us of his resurrection.
h 23 So, they put forward two [candidates]: Joseph called Barsabbas who was
surnamed Justus, and Matthias.
24 Then they prayed and said, 'You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which
one of these two you have chosen 25 to take part in this ministry and apostleship
from which Judas fell away to go to his own place.
26 And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was added to
the eleven apostles.

Gospel Reading:
18 No one has seen God at any time! The unique Song who is in the bosom of the
Father, he has explained him.
19 This is John's testimony, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from
Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' 20 He admitted and did not deny [it], [plainly]
admitting, 'I am not the Christ!' 21 They asked him, 'What then? Are you Elias
(Elijah)?' He said, 'I am not!' 'Are you the prophet?' He answered, 'No.
22 Therefore, they asked him, 'Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to

those who sent us.
What do you say about yourself?' 23 John said, 'I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as Isaias (Isaiah) the prophet said.
24 Those who had been sent were from the Pharisees.
25 They asked him, 'Why then do you baptize, if you are not the Christ, nor Elias (Elijah), nor the prophet?' 26 John answered them, 'I baptize in water, but among you stands one whom you do not know.
a 27 He is the one who comes after me, who is ranked before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie.
28 These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

Day 18-Apr-2023 Tuesday

Renewal Tuesday; Fast Free

Our Holy Father John, Disciple of St Gregory of Decapolis (820)

He entered monastic life when young and became a disciple of St Gregory of Decapolis (Nov. 20). In the days of the iconoclast heresy, he was privileged to be tortured along with his teacher St Gregory and St Joseph the Hymnographer (April 3) for their defense of the holy icons. When Gregory died, John became Abbot of the Decapolite monastery in Constantinople. He reposed in peace around 820; St Joseph buried him near St Gregory's grave.

The Holy Martyr John the New of Ioannina (1526)

He moved as a young man to Constantinople to work as a craftsman. After the Turkish conquest of Constantinople, many Christians had denied Christ and embraced Islam. John spoke with many of these about the Faith and challenged them for their betrayal of Christ. Shamed and angered, some of them had him arrested, falsely stating that he had earlier accepted Islam and then returned to Christianity, which is punishable by death in Islamic law. He was tortured and cast into prison. When he was brought out for more torture on the day of Pascha, John came forward full of joy and singing 'Christ is risen from the dead!' To his torturers he cried, 'Do what you will to me, and send me as quickly as possible from this transient life into life eternal. I am Christ's servant; I follow Christ, and I die for Christ that I may live with Him.' He has bound in chains and taken to be burned, but when he ran joyfully into the fire, his tormentors pulled him from the flames and beheaded him instead, then threw his head and body into the fire. Christians were able to gather a few of his wonderworking relics and bury them in the Great Church in Constantinople.

Euthymius the Wonderworker

Holy Martyr Sabas the Goth

Saint Cosmas the Confessor, Bishop of Chalcedon

Holy Martyr John Koulikas

Euthymius, Enlightener of Karelia and Finland, along with Anthony and Felix

Day 18-Apr-2023 Tuesday

Renewal Tuesday; Fast Free
Readings of the day: Acts 2:14-21; Luke 24:12-35

14 But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and spoke out to them: 'Men of Judea, and all of you who are [now] staying in Jerusalem, let this be explained to you and listen to my words.
15 For these [people] are not drunk, as you suppose.
It is only the third hour of the day! 16 But this is what has been announced through the prophet Joel: 17 It will be in the last days, says God, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.
Your sons and your daughters will prophesy.
Your young men will see visions.
Your old men will dream dreams.
18 Yes, and on my servants and on my handmaidens in those days, I will pour out my Spirit, and they will prophesy! 19 I will show wonders in the sky above, and signs on the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and billows of smoke.
20 The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and glorious day of the Lord comes.
21And it will be that whoever will call on the Name of the Lord will be saved.

Gospel Reading:
12 However, Peter got up and ran to the tomb.
Stooping and looking in, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves.
He returned to his home, wondering what had taken place.
a 13 It then happened that two of the disciples were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was sixty stadia from Jerusalem.
14 They were talking with each other about all of these things which had taken place.
15 And as they were talking together and discussing this, Jesus himself came near and went along with them.
16 However, their eyes were kept from recognizing him.
17 He asked them, 'What are you talking about as you walk?' And they stopped walking, looking sad.
18 One of them, named Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know what has happened there in these days?' 19 'What

things?' he asked to them.
They replied, 'The things concerning Jesus, the Nazarene! He was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people; 20 and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and had him crucified.
21 But we were hoping that he was the one who would redeem Israel.
Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things have taken place.
22 Also, certain women of our company have puzzled us: having arrived early at the tomb, 23 they did not find his body.
And they came back saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive! 24 Some of us went to the tomb, and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see him.
25 He said to them, 'You foolish men! So slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and enter into his glory?' 27 And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.
28 As they were approaching the village where they were going, he acted like he would continue on his way.
29 'Stay with us!' they urged him, saying, 'It is almost evening, and the day is almost over!' So he went in to stay with them.
30 Now, it happened that when he had sat down at the table with them, he took the bread and gave thanks.
Breaking it, he gave it to them.
31 And their eyes were opened; they knew him, and he vanished out of their sight.
32 Then they said one to another, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us along the way, and while he opened the Scriptures to us?' 33 They rose up that very hour, returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together and [also] those who were with them.
34 They were saying, 'The Lord is risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!'
35 Then, the two related what had happened along the way, and how they had recognized him in the breaking of the bread.

Day 19-Apr-2023 Wednesday

Renewal Wednesday; Fast Free

St John of the Ancient Caves in Palestine (8th c.)

Filled in his youth with the love of Christ and a hunger for holiness, he travelled among the holy places of the Middle East seeking the counsel of holy men. Finally he settled as a monk in the Ancient Caves of the Lavra of Chariton the Great in Palestine. Living in Chariton's own cave, he spent his days in fasting, prayer and vigil, becoming known in his own lifetime for his holiness. He reposed in peace in the 8th century.

Our Holy Father Agathangelos (1819)

"From Thrace, his worldly name being Anastasios, he was a slave to some Turks, and they compelled him to embrace Islam in Smyrna. As a penitent, he was tonsured at the monastery of Esphigmenou on the Holy Mountain. Tormented by his conscience, he desired to wash his sins in his own blood, so he went to Smyrna, where he showed a Cross and an icon of Christ's Resurrection to the Turks. He was beheaded on April 19th, 1819, at the age of nineteen. He appeared to his spiritual father, Germanos, after his death." (Prologue)

Blessed Matrona (the Blind) of Moscow (1952) (New Calendar commemoration May 2)

She was born in 1881 to a poor family in the village of Sebino-Epifaniskaya (now Kimovski). Though she was born blind — her eyes were without pupils — she showed a gift of spiritual insight from an early age, and by her prayers healed many who came to her.

At about the age of fourteen she made a pilgrimage to several Russian holy sites. When she came to Kronstadt to receive the blessing of St John (20 Dec.), the holy priest, who had never met her, cried out "Matrona, come here!" and proclaimed "She will be my heir, the eighth pillar of Russia."

At the age of seventeen she was stricken with paralysis and was never able to walk again. For the rest of her life she lived in a room filled with icons, where she would sit cross-legged on her bed and receive visitors. She never bemoaned her blindness or paralysis; once she said "A day came when God opened my eyes, and I saw the light of the sun, the stars and all that exists in the world: the rivers, the forests, the sea and the whole creation."

In 1925 she settled in Moscow. After the death of her mother in 1945, she moved frequently, living secretly in the homes of the faithful. Despite this, throngs of believers found their way to her for counsel and healing. The Communist authorities, knowing her holy influence, sought many times to

arrest her; but she always knew in advance when they were coming, and would be moved to a different secret location. She fasted much, slept rarely, and it is said that her forehead was dented by the countless signs of the Cross that she made.

Of the persecution of the Church by the Communists, she simply said that this was due to the sins and lack of faith of the Christians, and added, "Difficult times are our lot, but we Christians must choose the Cross. Christ has placed us on His sleigh, and He will take us where He will."

Having foreseen the day of her death, she said, "Come close, all of you, and tell me of your troubles as though I were alive! I'll see you; I'll hear you, and I'll come to your aid." She reposed in peace on April 19, 1952 (May 2 on the new calendar). Many miracles occurred at her tomb. In 1998 her relics were moved to the women's Monastery of the Protecting Veil of the Mother of God, where thousands of Orthodox Christians come to venerate her and, as she asked, to bring her their problems and concerns as though she were alive on earth.

She was glorified by the Church of Russia in 1999, for local veneration in the Diocese of Moscow.

Holy Hieromartyr Paphnutius of Jerusalem
George the Confessor
Saint Tryphon, Patriarch of Constantinople
Venerable Simeon the Barefoot of Philotheou

Day 19-Apr-2023 Wednesday

Renewal Wednesday; Fast Free
Readings of the day: Acts 2:22-36; John 1:35-51
22 Men of Israel, listen to these words! Jesus of Nazareth was a man attested to
you by God by deeds of power and wonders as well as signs which God
accomplished through him in the midst of you, even as you yourselves know.
23 He was handed over by the predetermined counsel and foreknowledge of God,
taken by the hand of lawless men, crucified and killed.
24 God raised him up, having released him from the pains of death, because it
was impossible that he should be held by it.
25 For David says concerning him: 'I saw the Lord always before my face, For he
is on my right hand, so that I should not be moved.
26 Therefore, my heart was glad and my tongue rejoiced.
Moreover, my flesh also will dwell in hope; 27 because you will not abandon my
soul to hades, neither will you allow your holy one to see decay.
28 You made known to me the ways of life.
You will make me full of gladness with your presence.
29 Brethren, I can tell you with confidence that the patriarch David died and was
buried, and his tomb is with us even to this day.
30 But he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that
from the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, God would raise up the Christ to
sit on his throne.
31 Foreseeing this, David spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, [declaring]
that his soul would not be left in hades and that his flesh would not see decay.
32 God has raised this Jesus [back to life], and we are all witnesses of this fact.
33 Being therefore exalted by the right hand of God and having received from the
Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, Jesusa has poured out what you now see
and hear.
34 For David did not ascend into the heavens, but as he himself declared: 'The
Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand, 35 until I make your enemies a footstool
for your feet.
b 36 Therefore, let all the house of Israel know with assurance that God has made
him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.

Gospel Reading:
35 Again, the next day, John was standing with two of his disciples.

36 He looked at Jesus as he was walking by and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God!'
37 The two disciples heard him speak, and they began to follow Jesus.
38 Turning and seeing them following, Jesus asked them, 'What are you looking for?' They said to him, 'Rabbi' (which translated means Teacher), 'where are you staying? 39 Jesus said to them, 'Come, and see!' They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day.
(It was about the tenth hour).
40 One of the two who heard John and who began to follow Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.
41 He first found his own brother, Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah!'g (which translated means Christ).
42 Andrew brought him to Jesus who looked at him, and said, 'You are Simon the son of Jonah.
You shall be called Kephas' (which translated means Peter).
43 On the next day, being determined to go out into Galilee, Jesus met Philip and said to him, 'Follow me!' 44 Now, Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.
45 Philip found Nathaniel and said to him, 'We have found the one of whom Moses in the law and the prophets, have written: Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph!'
46 Nathanael asked him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Philip replied, 'Come and see!' 47 As Jesus saw Nathaniel coming to him, he said about him, 'Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!' 48 Nathanael asked Jesus, 'How do you know me?' Jesus answered him, 'Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.
49 Nathanael replied, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are King of Israel!' 50 Jesus said to him, 'Because I told you, 'I saw you underneath the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these!' 51 He said to Philip, 'Amen, amen, I tell you; hereafter, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.

Day 20-Apr-2023 Thursday

Renewal Thursday; Fast Free

St Theodore Trichinas (the Hair-shirt wearer), hermit near Constantinople (400)

He was born in Constantinople to well-off and pious parents. He became a monastic in Thrace, and subjected himself to many ascetic labors, one of which was always to dress in a hair-shirt, from which he was called "Trichinas" (meaning "hairy"). He was granted the gift of working miracles, both during his lifetime and after his repose. His relics exuded a healing myrrh.

Holy Apostle Zaccheus

This is the tax-collector Zaccheus whom Jesus called down from the tree in Jericho (Luke ch. 19). He became a faithful disciple and, after the Resurrection, a companion of the Apostle Peter. He became Bishop of Caesarea in Palestine, where he served faithfully and reposed in peace.

Gregory and Anastasius, Patriarchs of Antioch

Child-martyr Gabriel of Poland

Venerable Athanasius and Joasaph of Meteora

Day 20-Apr-2023 Thursday

Renewal Thursday; Fast Free
Readings of the day: Acts 2:38-43; John 3:1-15
38 Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the Name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
39 For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all who are far away, even as many as the Lord our God will call to himself.
40 With many other words, he was bearing witness and urging them, saying, 'Save yourselves from this crooked generation!' 41 Then, those who gladly received his word were baptized, and about three thousand souls were added on that day.
42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers.
43 Fear came on every soul, and many wonders and signs were accomplished through the apostles.

Gospel Reading:
Now, there was one of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews.
2He came to Jesus by night, and said, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God because no one can performs the signs which you accomplish unless God is with him.
3 Jesus answered him, 'Amen, amen, I tell you; unless one is born anew,a he cannot see the Kingdom of God.
4 Nicodemus asked him, 'How can someone who is old be born? Can one enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born [anew]?' 5 Jesus answered, 'Amen, amen, I tell you; unless one is born of water and spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God! 6 What is born of the flesh is flesh.
What is born of the Spirit is spirit.
7 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born anew.
8 The wind blows where it wants to, and you hear its sound, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going.
So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.
9 Nicodemus said, 'How can this be?' 10 Jesus replied and said, 'You are the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things? 11 Amen, amen, I tell you; we speak of what we know, and [we] bear witness to what we have seen, and you do not receive our testimony.

12 If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell
you [about] heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended into heaven, except for the
one who came down out of heaven, the Son of Man who is in heaven.
d 14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, likewise, the Son of
Man must be lifted up, 15 so that everyone believing in him should not perish but
have eternal life.

Day 21-Apr-2023 Friday

Renewal Friday; Fast Free

Hieromartyr Januarius and those with him (305)

These martyrs gave glorious witness to Christ during the persecutions of Diocletian. St Januarius, Bishop of Benevento in Italy, was arrested and cast into a burning furnace, but he stood in the midst of the flames, singing praises to God, and emerged unharmed. After other cruel tortures, he was bound and cast in prison in Pozzuoli, along with his deacon Faustus and his reader Desiderius. With them in prison were two deacons from Pozzuoli, Proclus and Sossus, and two laymen, Eutychius and Acutius. All seven were cast to wild beasts; but when the animals came near the Saints, they fell affectionately at their feet and refused to harm them. Finally, all seven Christians were beheaded. Some Christians from Naples secretly took the body of Januarius and buried it in their church. Countless wonders have been worked at his grave, including the restoration of a dead man to life.

Holy Martyrs Alexandra the Empress and Companions

Martyr St Alexandra, the Empress and wife of Emperor Diocletion, was so impressed by the courage and martyrdom of St George that she became a Christian and fell under the same persecution. She also was condemned to be beheaded but when she arrived at the place of execution she asked to be allowed to sit down. Her request was granted. She sat down and died quietly before the executioners could carry out their task. Her feast day is 21 April.

Maximian of Constantinople

Venerable Anastasius the Sinaite

Day 21-Apr-2023 Friday

Renewal Friday; Fast Free
Readings of the day: Acts 3:1-8; John 2:12-22
3 Peter and John would go up into the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.
2 A certain man who was lame from his mother's womb was being carried.
Every day, he was laid at the gate of the temple (the one which is called 'Beautiful')
to ask alms from those entering the temple.
3 Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms.
4 Then Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze on him and said, 'Look at us!' 5 The
man gave them attention, expecting to receive something from them.
6 But Peter said, 'I have neither silver nor gold, but what I do have, I give to you.
In the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk!' 7 Peter took the man
by the right hand and raised him up.
At once, his feet and ankles received strength.
8 Leaping up, the man stood up and began to walk! He entered with them into the
temple, walking, leaping, and praising God!

Gospel Reading:
12 After this, he went down to Capernaum, he, and his mother, his brothers, and
his disciples; and they did not stay there [more than] a few days.
13 Now, the Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14
In the temple, he found those who sold oxen, sheep, and doves, as well as the
money changers sitting [at their booths].
15 So, he made a whip of cords and drove [them] all out of the temple, with the
sheep and the oxen; he also poured out the changers' money and overthrew their
tables.
16 To those who sold the doves, he said, 'Take these things out of here! Do not
make my Father's house a marketplace!'
17 Then, his disciples remembered that it was written: 'Zeal for your house will
consume me.' 18 Therefore, the Jews declared, 'What sign do you show us, since
you do these things?'
19 Jesus answered and responded to them, 'Destroy this sanctuary, and in three
days I will raise it up! 20 The Jews then said, 'It took forty-six years to build this
sanctuary, and you will raise it up in three days?'
21 (But he was speaking of the sanctuary of his body). 22 When therefore he was
raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they
believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.

Day 22-Apr-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Our Holy Father Theodore of Sykeon (613)

He was born in Sykeon in Galatia in Asia Minor. (The Great Horologion says that he was born out of wedlock; the Prologue that his mother, Maria, was a rich widow; in either case, he was reared by his mother alone). At the age of ten, Theodore took up a life of strict asceticism, devoting himself to prayer, fasting and vigils. His mother planned for him to enter the military; but St George appeared to her in a dream, telling her that Theodore was to serve the King of Heaven rather than any earthly king. After this, Saint George appeared to Theodore many times, sometimes instructing him, sometimes saving him from danger. After a trip to the Holy Land, Theodore became a monk in Galatia — we should say "officially became a monk," since he had been living as a monk from the age of ten. Once he had taken monastic vows, Theodore redoubled his ascetical labors, which exceeded those of any other monk of his time: for his asceticism, he was sometimes called the "Iron-eater." Around 584 was ordained Bishop of Anastasiopolis in Galatia, much against his will. He served his flock faithfully for ten years, then begged to be relieved of his episcopal duties so that he might return to his beloved monastic life. Even during his lifetime, he was famed for his miracles and his authority to cast out demons. He departed this life in peace in 613.

Holy Martyr Leonidas (202)

He was the father of Origen, the great early Christian writer. For his constant faith in Christ, he was first deprived of all his property, then condemned to death. Origen wrote to his father in prison: "Father, do not worry about us, and do not flee from martyrdom on our account."

Our Holy Father, the monk Vitalis

See his main commemoration on January 11.

Holy Apostle Nathanael

Holy Martyr Nearchus

Day 22-Apr-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Acts 3:11-16; John 3:22-33

11 As the lame man who had been healed held on to Peter and John, all the
people were greatly astonished and ran together to them in the porch that is called
Solomon's [Porch].
12 When Peter saw this, he answered to the people, 'Men of Israel, why do you
marvel at this man? Why do you gaze at us, as though by our own power or
godliness we had made him walk? 13 The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the
God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and
denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had determined to release him.
14 But you denied the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be
granted to you.
15 Then you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead.
To this we are witnesses.
16 By faith in his Name, this man whom you see and know was made strong.
Yes, the faith which comes through Jesus has given him this perfect soundness as
you all can see.

Gospel Reading:

22 After these things, Jesus came with his disciples into the land of Judea.
He stayed there with them, and baptized.
23 John also was baptizing at Enon near Salim, because there was much water
there, and people came, and [they] were baptized.
24 (For John had not yet been thrown into prison).
25 Now, a discussion arose on the part of John's disciples with some Jews about
ceremonial washing.
26 They came to John and said to him, 'Rabbi, he who was with you beyond the
Jordan, to whom you bore witness, behold, this one is [now] baptizing, and
everyone is coming to him!' 27 John answered, 'No one can receive anything
unless it has been given him from heaven.
28 You yourselves testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent
before him.
29 He who has the bride is the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom who
stands [by] and hears him rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice.
And so my joy is fulfilled.

30 He must increase, but I must decrease.
31 He who comes from above is above all.
He who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and he speaks from the earth.
He who comes from heaven is above all.
32 What he has seen and heard is what he bears witness to, but no one accepts his testimony.
33 He who has accepted his testimony has set his seal [to this], that God is true.

Day 23-Apr-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Saint George the Great Martyr and Triumphant

This glorious and victorious saint was born in Cappadocia, the son of wealthy and virtuous parents. His father suffered for Christ, and his mother then moved to Palestine. When George grew up he entered the military, where he attained, in this twentieth year, the rank of tribune, and as such he was in the service of the Emperor Diocletian. When Diocletian began his terrible persecution of Christians, George came before him and courageously confessed that he was a Christian. The emperor had him thrown into prison and ordered that his feet be placed in stocks and that a heavy stone be placed on his chest. After that, the emperor commanded that George be tied to a wheel, under which was a board with large nails, and he was to be rotated until his whole body became as one bloody wound. After that, they buried him in a pit with only his head showing above the ground, and there they left him for three days and three nights. Then George was given a deadly poison to drink by a magician. But through all of these sufferings, George continuously prayed to God, and God healed him instantly and saved him from death, to the great astonishment of the people. When he also resurrected a dead man through his prayers, many accepted the Christian Faith. Among these were Alexandra, the wife of the Emperor Diocletian; the chief pagan priest; the farmer Glycerius; and Valerius, Donatus and Therinus. Finally the emperor commanded that George and his own wife Alexandra to be beheaded. Blessed Alexandra died on the scaffold before being beheaded, and St. George was beheaded, in the year 303. The miracles which have occurred over the grave of St. George are countless. Numerous are his appearances, both in dreams and openly, to those who, from that time to today, have invoked him and implored his help. Inflamed with love for Christ the Lord, it was not difficult for this saintly George, for the sake of this love, to leave all: rank, wealth, imperial honor, his friends and the entire world. For this love, the Lord rewarded him with a wreath of unfading glory in heaven and on earth, and with

eternal life in His Kingdom. In addition, the Lord bestowed upon him the power and authority to assist all those in afflictions and difficulties who honor him and call upon his name.

Source: St. Nikolai Velimirovic, The Prologue of Ohrid – Volume One.

Apolytikion

Liberator of captives, defender of the poor, physician of the sick, and champion of kings, O trophy-bearer, Great Martyr George, intercede with Christ God that our souls be saved.

Holy New Martyr George of Ptolemais
Venerable George of Shenkursk
Holy New Martyr Lazarus the Bulgarian

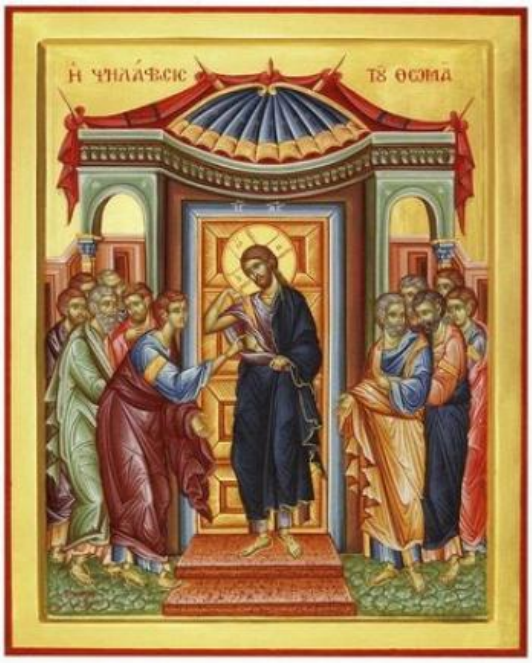
Day 23-Apr-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Sunday of Thomas
Acts 5:12-20; John 20:19-31
12 Even more, many signs and wonders were accomplished among the people by
the hands of the apostles, and they were all [gathered] with one accord in
Solomon's porch.
13 No one else dared to join them, even though they were honored by the people.
14 More believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women.
15 People even carried out the sick into the streets, placing them on cots and
mattresses, so that as Peter came by, at the least his shadow might fall on some of
them.
16 Crowds also formed from the cities around Jerusalem; they brought sick
people, as well as those tormented by unclean spirits, and all were healed.
17 However, the high priest took action, along with all his associates (which is the
sect of the Sadducees).
Filled with jealousy, 18 they had the apostles arrested and placed in the public jail.
19 But an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors by night and brought them
out, saying, 20 'Go, stand in the temple, and speak to the people the whole
message about this life.

Gospel Reading: Sunday of Thomas

19 In the evening on that [same] day (the first day of the week), and as the doors
[of the place] where the disciples were assembled were locked, for fear of the
Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.
20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side.
At this, the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.
21 Then again, Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I also
send you.
22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and told them, 'Receive the Holy
Spirit! 23 If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; if you retain anyone's sins,
they are retained.
24 However, Thomas called 'the Twin,' one of the Twelve, was not with them when
Jesus came.
25 So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord!' But Thomas replied,
'Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails and put my hand into his side, I will



not believe!' 26 After eight days, his disciples were inside once again, and Thomas was with them.
Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them, and he said, 'Peace be with you.
27 Then, he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here, and see my hands! Place your hand here and put it into my side.
Do not be unbelieving, but believing!' 28 Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!'
29 Jesus said to him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed! Blessed are those who have not seen, and have believed.
30 Now, Jesus accomplished many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.
31 However, these ones are written, so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, you may have life in his Name.
SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING

Christ is risen! But Thomas does not believe it.
Christ is risen! He has appeared to Maria and the women.
Christ is risen! He has appeared to the friends going to Emmaus.
Christ is risen! He has appeared to the ten disciples and has given them the Holy Spirit to forgive.
Christ is risen, but Thomas does not believe.
At last, the risen Christ demands of Thomas to look, to touch, to put his fingers into His wounds and his hand in His Heart, and to come out of his disbelief.
Christ is risen! He also demands of me, a Christian, to be full of faith.
Yes, the victorious risen Christ demands of me a life of faith.
He gave me this power of faith on the day of my Baptism.
By Chrismation, I was branded with the gift of the Holy Spirit, as the Apostles were.
Through Holy Communion, I am nourished and energized, as the Apostles were.
Through Holy Confession of my sins, I am restored and protected, as the Apostles were.
By Holy Marriage, the self preservation of my temporal life is elevated to the harmony of the economy of the Trinity of God, as some of the Apostles were.
The Power and Judgement of God is deposited in the hand of Man thanks to and through the Priesthood, because the Apostles received it from the risen Christ.
By the Holy Unction, I am healed and revitalized for my last steps towards the Eternal Life, as the Apostles taught.
All these Mysteries, or Sacraments, are the pledge for the promise that, at my

temporal life's death, I shall pass-over (Pascha) to the Eternal Life, the Kingdom of the One God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
What a great mercy, what an everlasting life is granted to us, for Christ is risen!
Therefore the risen Christ demands of me, a Christian, a follower of Him and His disciple, like Thomas was, to be full of faith.
This means that all my thoughts, all my words, all my actions be transformed by the force, the power, of faith in Christ.
The Apostles did not stay sitting down at home but went out to transmit to the world what Christ had commanded: doing wonders, signs, healing the sick, those bed-redden, those afflicted with unclean spirits.
They were all healed.
How did the Apostles do these signs and wonders? They were among the people in the Temple, in the Portico of Solomon, where the principle activity was to pray, giving glory to God, the Creator of all.
Another activity in the Temple was to teach the Law, the Torah of God given to Moses.
That is, to learn how to organize the thoughts, words and actions of every day according to the Commandments of God.
I, the Christian full of faith, come to the Church, among the people of Christ, to pray and to learn how to live the Commandments of God as taught by the Son of God, the risen Christ.
How does the Church teach us? This is done at the Divine Liturgy, with the reading of two passages from the New Testament.
These passages are selected for me to learn how to live the life of faith according to Christ.
On Pascha Night we begin reading the Gospel of John, up to Pentecost; then we shall do so with the Gospel of Mathew, followed by Luke and so Mark.
Similarly on Pascha Night we begin the book of the Acts of the Apostles; and so, from Pentecost it is put to us to read Romans, Corinthians, etc., and the rest of the letters of the Apostles.
Therefore, at the arriving of next Pascha we have read, with the exception of the Apocalypse, all of the the New Testament.
The passages of the Gospel and the Apostle readings are very much inter-twined, that each day we may learn a particular practical point.
In this way we, imitating the Apostles' presence in the Temple of Jerusalem, are present every day in the temple of the Holy Trinity, listening the Word of God.
We do not need to be in Church every day, but we read the selected passages every day in our homes, in the loneliness of our hearts with God and our holy Guardian Angel.
This is the life of faith, of prayer, receiving the Son of God, transforming us into Himself, for He has risen and gone to prepare a place for you and me in His Eternal Life.

Day 24-Apr-2023 Monday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)

Martyr Sabbas Strateletes ("the General") of Rome, and 70 soldiers with him (272)

He came from a noble Gothic family. Like St George, he was an officer in the imperial army. He lived a life of great purity, fasted greatly, and often visited imprisoned Christians. Because of this his Christian faith became known, and when he was summoned before the Emperor, he boldly confessed his faith. He was tortured in many ways, but emerged unharmed. Seeing this miracle, seventy of his fellow-soldiers confessed Christ and were beheaded at the Emperor's command. Sabbas himself was condemned to death by drowning, and gave his soul to God in 272.

Our Holy Mother Elizabeth the Wonderworker

In her early youth Elizabeth entered the monastic state in the Monastery of Saints Cosmas and Damian in Constantinople, taking upon herself heavy ascetic labors for the sake of Christ God and for the sake of her soul. She considered herself a bride of Christ and viewed this world as though it did not exist. Her great compassion toward people, especially toward the sick and the suffering, emanated from her great love for God. With the gift that God had bestowed upon her, she cured various diseases and afflictions of the people. During her nightly prayers she was seen to be encompassed by a heavenly light. Following her death, her relics possessed the power of healing, and a great number of the sick and suffering have gathered at her grave throughout the ages. She died peacefully and entered into the eternal joy of her Lord in the year 540.

The Holy Martyrs Pasicrates and Valentine

Originally from Durostorum (now Silistra in Bulgaria), in Moesia, the two holy martyrs served in the Roman army during the persecution of Diocletian. Pasicrates was twenty-two years old and Valentine was thirty. Realising that many Christians had submitted to the imperial edicts and had sacrificed to idols through fear of torture, they were seized by a divine zeal and publicly proclaimed themselves disciples of Christ, probably at the same time as Saint Julius the Veteran, one of their fellow-citizens.

Arrested on the spot, they were led before the governor Aulozanus. When a

statue of Apollo was presented to Pasicrates to worship, he spat on it with disdain, proclaiming that this was the only honour of which it was worthy. They threw him into prison, where they loaded him with heavy chains, but he tenderly kissed these bonds as a precious ornament and as the means through which he would communicate in the Passion of Christ.

During a second appearance before the tribunal, his brother Papian threw himself at his feet in tears, begging him to follow his example and offer incense and only pretend to sacrifice. Pasicrates repulsed him with disdain, stating henceforth they were strangers and that he was devoid of any kinship with someone who had denied Christ. He approached the altar and, holding his hand over the fire, declared that, while his corruptible flesh might be consumed by the fire, his soul would remain incorruptible and free from the passions, so that he might inherit eternal life.

Saint Valentine was interrogated in his turn and showed the same resolution as his companion, and they were therefore both condemned to be beheaded. Pasicrates' mother followed them to the place of execution and encouraged her son to remain firm until the end of his battle. The two saints carried off the crown of martyrdom a little time before Saints Nicander and Marcion (8 June), who were also originally from Durostorum.

Source: The Synaxarion: The Lives of the Saints of the Orthodox Church. Volume Four, March & April. Holy Convent of The Annunciation of Our Lady, Ormylia (Chalkidike), 2003.

Holy Martyrs Eusebius, Neon, Leontius and Longinus

Holy New Martyrs Luke and Nicholas

Venerable Thomas Fool-for-Christ

Day 24-Apr-2023 Monday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)
Readings of the day: Acts 3:19-26; John 2:1-11
19 Repent therefore, and turn back [to God], so that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, 20 and that he may send Christ Jesus who was in advanced ordained for you.
21 He must remained in heaven until the times of restoration of all things, which God announced long ago by the mouth of his holy prophets.
22 Indeed, Moses indeed said to the fathers, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your brethren.
You shall listen to him in all that he tells you.
23 And it shall be that every soul that will not listen to that prophet will be utterly cut off from among the people.
24 In fact, all the prophets that have spoken, from Samuel to those who followed after [him], have also announced these days.
25 You are the children of the prophets, and [children] of the covenant which God made with our fathers when he said to Abraham, 'In your seed will all the families of the earth be blessed.
26 God, having raised up [to life] his servant Jesus, sent him to you first, in order to bless you as everyone of you turns away from his wicked ways.

Gospel reading:
The third day, there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.
2Jesus also was invited, with his disciples, to the wedding.
3When the wine ran out, Jesus' mother said to him, 'They have no wine.
4 Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what is that to you and me? My hour has not yet come.
5His mother said to the servants, 'Whatever he tells you to do, do it.
6 Now, six water jars made of stone were set there, meant for the rites of purification of the Jews, and they each contained two or three measures.
d 7 Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water!' So they filled them up to the brim.
8 He then said to them, 'Now, draw some out, and take it to the chief steward of the feast;' and they did so.
9 When the chief steward of the feast tasted the water now become wine (not knowing where it had come from, but the servants who had drawn the water knew), he called the bridegroom 10 and said to him, 'Everyone serves the good wine first, and after the guests have drunk freely, the inferior one.

But you have kept the good wine until now!' 11 This, the beginning of his signs,
Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee.
He revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

Day 25-Apr-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Holy Apostle and Evangelist Mark (68?)

"Mark was an idolater from Cyrene of Pentapolis, which is near Libya. Having come to the Faith of Christ through the Apostle Peter, he followed him to Rome. While there, at the prompting of Peter himself and at the request of the Christians living there, he wrote his Gospel in Greek... Afterwards, travelling in Egypt, he preached the Gospel there and was the first to establish the Church in Alexandria. The idolators, unable to bear his preaching, seized him, bound him with ropes, and dragged him through the streets until he, cut to pieces on rocks, gave up his soul. It is said that he completed his life in martyrdom about the year 68. He is depicted in holy icons with a lion next to him, one of the living creatures mentioned by Ezekiel (1:10), and a symbol of Christ's royal office, as St Irenaeus of Lyons writes." (Great Horologion)

Saint Ananias, Second Bishop of Alexandria (1st c.)

When St Mark the Apostle first came to Alexandria, he tore one of his shoes and took it to a cobbler. While the cobbler, whose name was Ananias, was working, he drove his awl through his hand, injuring himself badly. The Apostle mixed dust with his spittle and anointed the hand, which immediately became whole. Amazed at the miracle, Ananias invited St Mark to his house, listened to him as he proclaimed the Gospel, believed, and was baptized along with his household. Such was Ananias' zeal for the Gospel that St Mark made him bishop of the Christians in the city. He was the second Bishop of Alexandria.

Saint Macedonius II, Patriarch of Constantinople

Venerable Eight Anchorites

Venerable Sylvester of Obnora

Day 25-Apr-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Acts 4:1-10; John 3:16-21

4 Peter and John arrested As they were speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came to them.
2 They were upset because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.
3 They arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, since it was now the evening.
4 But many of those who heard the word believed, and their number came to be about five thousand.
5In the morning, their leaders, presbyters and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem.
6 Annas (the high priest) was there, along with Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and others that were relatives of the high priest.
7 After placing the apostles in the middle of their assembly, they inquired, 'By what power, or in what Name, have you done this?'
8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, addressed them: 'Rulers of the people and presbyters of Israel; 9 if we are examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man and by what means this man has been healed, 10 let it be known to you all and to all the people of Israel that is it in the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth (whom you crucified and whom God raised from the dead) that this man stands here before you whole.

Gospel reading: John 3:16-21

16 Indeed, God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.
17 Certainly, God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world, but so that the world should be saved through him.
18 Anyone who believes in him is not judged, but whoever does not believe has already been judged, because such a person has not believed in the Name of the only-begotten Son of God.
19 This is the judgment: that the light has come into the world, and people have loved the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil.
20 For everyone who practices evil hates the light and does not come to the light, for fear that his works would be exposed.
21 But whoever practices the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be revealed as done in God.

Day 26-Apr-2023 Wednesday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)

Hieromartyr Basil, bishop of Amasia and Righteous Virgin Glaphyra (322)

Licinius was co-emperor with Constantine the Great. At his accession, he had agreed to tolerate Christianity in his territories, but soon turned to persecuting the Christians, and to a variety of carnal sins. He conceived a passion for Glaphyra, a Christian virgin handmaid of the Empress Constantia. When Glaphyra told Constantia of this, the Empress sent her away to Amasia in the East for her protection. There she was received and protected by Bishop Basil of that city. Licinius learned where Glaphyra was hiding and ordered that both she and the bishop be brought to him as prisoners. The soldiers who came for her found that she had already died, so they returned with only Bishop Basil, who was subjected to cruel tortures, then beheaded. His body was cast into the sea, but, with the help of an angel of God, his people found his body, retrieved it from the sea, and returned it to Amasia.

The Prologue adds, "The Emperor Constantine raised an army against Licinius, overcame him, arrested him and sent him into exile in Gaul, where he ended his God-hating days."

St Stephen,Bishop of Perm (1396)

As a young man he entered monastic life at the monastery of St Gregory the Theologian in Rostov. Learning that the land of Perm (on the western slopes of the Ural Mountains) was still immured in paganism, he was filled with a desire to bring the Gospel to its people. He set about learning the language, created an alphabet and translated the service books. With the blessing of the Metropolitan of Moscow he then set out and began his apostolic labors. When, after much difficulty and many sufferings, he had gathered a community of baptised Christians, he was made Bishop of the region. Once, in his old age, he returned to Moscow, where he reposed in 1396.

Saint Glaphyra the Righteous

Saint Joannicius of Devich

Venerable Nestor

Day 26-Apr-2023 Wednesday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)
Readings of the day: Acts 4:13-22; John 5:17-24
13 Now, seeing the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed and recognized that these two men had been with Jesus.
14 Seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.
15 But after instructing them to step out of the council, they conferred among themselves,
16 saying, 'What shall we do to these men? Indeed, a remarkable miracle has been accomplished through them, as can plainly be seen by all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it.
17 Nevertheless, to prevent this from spreading any further among the people, let us threaten them so that from now on, they will no longer speak to anyone in this Name.
18 They called the apostles and ordered them not to speak at all or to teach in the Name of Jesus.
19 But Peter and John answered them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, judge for yourselves!
20 But we cannot help telling the things which we saw and heard!' 21 When they had further threatened the apostles, they let them go.
They found no way to punish them on account of the people, because everyone glorified God for what had been done.
22 (Moreover, the man on whom this miracle of healing had been performed was more than forty years old).

>Gospel Reading:
17 But Jesus answered them, 'My Father is still working, and I am also working.
18 Because of this, the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, not only because he broke the Sabbath, but also because he called God his own Father, making himself equal with God.
19 Accordingly, Jesus answered them, 'Amen, amen, I tell you; the Son can do nothing of himself, but [only] what he sees the Father doing.
Indeed, whatever the Father does, the Son also does likewise.
20 For the Father has deep affection for the Son, and shows him all things that he himself does.

And the Father will show him greater works than these, so that you may be astonished.
21 For [just] as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, likewise the Son also gives life to whom he desires.
22 As it is, the Father judges no one, but he has given all judgment to the Son,
23 so that all may honor the Son even as they honor the Father.
Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him! 24 Amen, amen, I tell you; the one who hears my word and believes in him who sent me has eternal life and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

Day 27-Apr-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Hieromartyr Symeon the Kinsman of the Lord (107)

He was the nephew of Joseph the Betrothed, and one of the Seventy. When the Apostle James, first Bishop of Jerusalem, was martyred, St Symeon was named to replace him. As second Bishop of Jerusalem he governed the Church there to a very great age. In the time of the Emperor Trajan a persecution broke out in Palestine against both Christians and Jews; Symeon was condemned on both counts, and was privileged to die, like his Lord, by crucifixion. He was 120 years old.

Our Holy Father Stephen, Abbot of the Kiev Caves and Bishop of Vladimir (1094)

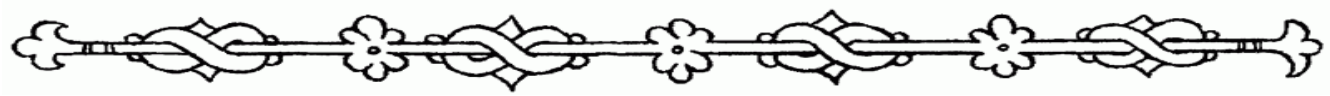
He was a disciple of St Theodosius of the Kiev Caves (commemorated May 3), and became abbot of the Monastery of the Caves. After many years of faithful service he fell victim to the intrigues of a monk against him, lost his abbacy and was even driven from the monastery. In God's time the holy monk was vindicated and made Bishop of Vladimir. There he guided the Church for many years, reposing peacefully in old age in 1094.

Burning of the relics of St Sava I of Serbia by the Turks (1594)

At the time of the Turkish occupation, so many Serbian Christians gathered around the relics of St Sava (at Mileseva), pleading for his intercession, that the Ottoman ruler, Sinan Pasha, feared that the relics would become the focus of a popular rebellion. He therefore had the relics brought to Belgrade and burned. The Pasha is long gone; the Saint continues to intercede for his people and for the world.

John the Confessor, Abbot of the Kathara Monastery

Venerable Eulogios the Hospitable



Day 27-Apr-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Acts 4:23-31; John 5:24-30

23 After being released, the apostles came to their own [company] and reported everything that the chief priests and the presbyters had said to them.
24 When they heard it, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord and said, 'O Lord, you are God who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all that is in them; 25 who by the mouth of your servant, David, said,'Why do the nations rage, and the peoples plot a vain thing? 26 The kings of the earth take a stand, and the rulers take council together, against the Lord, and against his Christ.
27 For truly, in this city, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together against your holy child, Jesus, whom you anointed.
28 They did whatever your hand and counsel had foreordained to happen.
29 And now, Lord, consider their threats and grant your servants to speak your word with complete boldness.
30 Stretch out your hand to heal, and may signs and wonders may be accomplished through the Name of your holy child Jesus.
31 When they had prayed, the place where they were gathered was shaken. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and proclaimed the word of God with boldness.

Gospel Reading:

24 Amen, amen, I tell you; the one who hears my word and believes in him who sent me has eternal life and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.
25 Amen, amen, I tell you; the hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will come to life.
26 For as the Father has life in himself, so has he given to the Son to have life in himself.
27 He also gave him authority to execute judgment, because he is Son of Man.
28 Do not be astonished at this, because the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice 29 and come out; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment.
30 I can do nothing of myself.

As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is righteous because I do not seek my own will, but the will of my Father who sent me.

Day 28-Apr-2023 Friday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)

The Nine Martyrs at Cyzicus (3rd c.)

These nine holy Martyrs were from various places, but when they refused to offer sacrifice to idols or to deny Christ, all were beheaded together in Cyzicus, a city in Asia Minor on the coast of the Sea of Marmara. Their names were Theognis, Rufus, Antipater, Theostoichus, Artemas, Magnus, Theodotus, Thaumasilas and Philemon. During the reign of the Emperor Constantine a church was built in Cyzicus in their honor, and their incorrupt relics were deposited there.

They are commemorated April 29 on the Slavic calendar.

Our Venerable Father Memnon the Wonderworker

Saint Cyril, Bishop of Turov

Day 28-Apr-2023 Friday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)
Readings of the day: Acts 5:1-11; John 5:30-6:2
1 Now, a certain man named Ananias, along with his wife Sapphira, [also] sold a possession.
2 He kept back part of the price (of which his wife was also aware) and brought the rest, laying it at the apostles' feet.
3 But Peter said, 'Ananias, how is it that Satan has filled your heart so as to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back part of the price of the land? 4 As long as you kept it, was it not still your own? And after it was sold, was it not [still] in your power? How is it that you have conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God!' 5 Upon hearing these words, Ananias fell to the ground and died.
Great fear came on all who heard these things.
6 The young men got up, wrapped him up, and carried him out to be buried.
7 About three hours later, his wife, not knowing what had happened, came in.
8 Peter asked her, 'Tell me, was this the price you sold the land for?' She answered, 'Yes, for that price.
9 Then Peter said to her, 'How is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out!' 10 At once, she fell down at Peter's feet and died.
The young men came in and found her dead; they carried her out and buried her next to her husband.
11 Great fear came on the whole Church and on all who heard these things.

Gospel Reading

30 I can do nothing of myself.
As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is righteous because I do not seek my own will, but the will of my Father who sent me.
31 'If I bear witness about myself, my testimony is not valid.
32 There is another who bears witness to me, and I know that the testimony by which he bears witness about me is true.
33 You have sent [messengers] to John, and he has testified to the truth.
34 However, the testimony which I receive is not from man.
However, I say these things so that you may be saved.
35 John was the burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a

while in his light.
36 But the testimony which I have is greater than that of John, because the works which the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I do, they bear witness about me, that the Father has sent me.
37 The Father himself, who sent me, he has testified about me.
You have never heard his voice at any time, and you have never seen his outward appearance.
38 You do not have his word living in you, because you do not believe the one whom he sent.
39 You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me.
40 Yet, you will not come to me to have life.
41 I do not receive glory from men, 42 but I know you, that you do not have God's love in yourselves.
43 I have come in my Father's Name, and you do not receive me.
If another comes in his own name, you will receive him! 44 How can you believe, since you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?c 45 Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father.
The one who accuses you is in fact Moses, on whom you have set your hope.
46 For if you believed Moses, you would believe me because he wrote about me.
47 But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?' After these things, Jesus went away to the other side of the sea of Galilee (or [also called] of Tiberias).
2 A great multitude followed him, because they saw the signs he accomplished on those who were sick.

Day 29-Apr-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Apostles Jason and Sosipater

Both were disciples of the Apostle Paul, who mentions them in his Epistle to the Romans: "Jason and Sosipater my kinsmen greet you" (16:21). Jason was born in Tarsus of Cilicia (as was the Apostle Paul), and became bishop of that town. Sosipater was from Patras of Achaia (now Greece), and became bishop of Iconium. After serving their flocks for many years, these two travelled together to Corfu, where they were the first to preach the Gospel. They were furiously opposed by the ruler of that island, but when he died, the new king came to faith in Christ and was baptised with the name Sebastian. Jason and Sosipater remained on Corfu, freely preaching the Gospel and building up the Church until they reposed in great old age. An ancient church in the city of Corfu, dating from the first centuries, bears inscriptions that mention the Saints by name.

They are commemorated April 28 on the Slavic calendar.

St Basil, bishop of Ostrog in Montenegro (Serbia) (1671)

As a monk, he was known for his very severe asceticism. Against his will, he was made Bishop of Zahum, where he served his flock faithfully for many years, "keeping it from the cruelty of the Turks and the guile of the Latins" (Prologue). When his monastery was destroyed by the Turks he moved to Ostrog, where he reposed. His body has remained whole, incorrupt, healing and wonderworking to this day. Innumerable miracles have been worked at his grave; both Christians and Muslims seek out his relics for healing from sicknesses and sufferings.

(A story heard from a parishioner at St Basil of Ostrog Church in Illinois: while the Saint's relics remain intact, reputedly his shoes wear out from time to time and need to be replaced.)

St Nektary of Optina (1928)

Saint John Kaloktenes, Metropolitan of Thebes

Venerable Nicephorus of Sebaze

Day 29-Apr-2023 Saturday

Fast Free
Readings of the day: Acts 5:21-33; John 6:14-27
21 When the apostles heard this, they went to the temple at about daybreak, and they began to teach.
Meanwhile, the high priest arrived, together which his associates, and called the Sanhedrin together, along with the council of the children of Israel.
He then sent [word] to the prison to have the apostles brought in.
22 But the officers who came did not find them in the prison.
They came back and reported, 23 'We found the prison shut and locked, and the guards standing before the doors, but when we opened them, we found no one inside!' 24 Now, when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these words, they were very perplexed about them, wondering what would come of this.
25 One [officer] came forward and told them, 'Behold, the men whom you put in prison are [now] in the temple, standing and teaching the people.
26 Then, the captain went with the officers and brought them without using force because they were afraid that the people might stone them.
27 Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin.
The high priest questioned them, 28 saying, 'Did we not strictly order you not to teach in this Name? Behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us!' 29 But Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than men! 30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree.
b 31 God has exalted him with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior in order to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins.
32 We are his witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit that God has given to those who obey him.
33 Hearing this, they were enraged and determined to kill them.

Gospel Reading:

14 When the people saw the sign which Jesus had accomplished, they said, 'This is truly the prophet who comes into the world!' 15 Jesus therefore, perceiving that they were about to come and take him by force in order to make him king, withdrew again to the mountain by himself.
16 When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea 17 where they got into

the boat and headed across the sea to Capernaum.
It was now dark, and Jesus had not returned to them.
18 Because a great wind was blowing, the sea became rough.
19 After rowing about three or four miles, the disciplesc saw Jesus walking on the sea and approaching the boat.
And they were frightened, 20 but Jesus said to them, 'It is I!d Do not be afraid!'
21At this, they were willing to receive him into the boat, and immediately, the boat reached the shore where they were going.
22 On the next day, the multitude that stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other boat there, and that Jesus had not entered with his disciples into the boat, but that his disciples had gone away alone.
23 However, [a few] boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks.
24 And so, when the multitude noticed that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum to seek Jesus.
25 When they found him on the other side of the sea, they asked him, 'Rabbi, when did you arrive here?' 26 Jesus answered them, 'Amen, amen, I tell you; you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were satisfied.
27 Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which remains to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you.
For the Father has sealed him – [even] God!'

Day 30-Apr-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

† Holy Apostle James, the brother of St John the Theologian (45)

"The son of Zebedee and brother of John, he was one of the Twelve. At the call of the Lord Jesus, he left his fishing nets and his father and, together with John, immediately followed Christ. He was one of the three apostles to whom the Lord revealed the greatest mysteries: before whom He was transfigured on Tabor and before whom He was in agony in the Garden of Gethsemane before His Passion. After receiving the Holy Spirit, he preached the Gospel in various places, going as far as Spain. On his return from Spain, a violent quarrel broke out between the Jews and himself on the Holy Scriptures, and, being unable to withstand him, they hired a magician, Hermogenes. But Hermogenes and Philip his pupil were overcome by the power and truth that James preached, and were baptised. Then the Jews denounced him to Herod, and persuaded one Josias to slander the Apostle. This Josias, seeing James's manly bearing and hearing his clear preaching of the truth, repented and came to faith in Christ. When James was condemned to death, this Josias was also condemned. Mounting the scaffold, Josias begged James's forgiveness for the sin of slander, and James embraced him, kissing him and saying: 'peace be to thee, and forgiveness.' And they both laid their heads under the sword and were beheaded for the sake of the Lord whom they had loved and served. St James suffered in Jerusalem in the year 45. His body was taken to Spain, where to this day miracles of healing are performed at his tomb." (Prologue)

His relics are venerated at his shrine in Compostela, Spain.

St Ignatius (Brianchaninov), Bishop of Stavropol and Kavkaz (1867)

He was born in 1807 into Russian aristocracy — his father was a wealthy provincial gentleman. From a very early age he felt strongly called to monastic life, but at that time it was almost unheard of for a nobleman to take such a path, and Dimitri (as he was called in baptism) entered the Pioneer Military School in St Petersburg. There he distinguished himself, and even attracted the attention of Grand Duke Nicholas Pavlovich, an event which would profoundly affect his later life.

Despite his excellent record at the academy, young Dimitri still longed only for the things of God. In 1827 he graduated from the school and was commissioned as an officer in the army, but soon fell critically ill, and was granted a discharge. This proved to be providential: when he recovered his health, he immediately became a novice, living at several different

monasteries and coming under the spiritual care of Starets Leonid, one of the celebrated fathers of the Optina monastery. In 1821 he took his monastic vows and received the name Ignatius. Soon afterwards he was ordained to the priesthood.

Soon after the newly-professed Fr Ignatius had entered the seclusion that he sought, Tsar Nicholas I — the former Grand Duke Nicholas — visited the Pioneer Military School and asked what had become of the promising cadet he had met a few years before. When the Tsar learned that the former Dimitri was now a monk, he sought him out, had him elevated to the rank of Archimandrite (at age 26!) and made him Superior of the St Sergius Monastery in St Petersburg. Tsar Nicholas instructed him to make the monastery a model for all Russian religious communities. Though he had desired only a life of solitude and prayer, the new Archimandrite devoted himself conscientiously to fulfilling the Tsar's charge. The monastery did in fact become a kind of standard for Russian monasticism, and its abbot acquired many spiritual children, not only among his monks but among the laity in the capital.

After twenty-four years as superior of the monastery, St Iganatius was elevated to the episcopate in 1857, first as Bishop of Stavropol, then as Bishop of Kavkaz. Only four years later (aged 54) he resigned and spent the rest of his life in reclusion at the Nicolo-Babaevsky Monastery in the diocese of Kostromo. There he continued the large body of spiritual writings for which he is well known. His printed Works fills five volumes; of these, at least two major works have been translated into English: On the Prayer of Jesus and The Arena: an offering to contemporary monasticism. Both are gems of spiritual writing, profitable to every serious Orthodox Christian.

St Ignatius reposed in peace in 1867. He was glorified in 1988 by the Moscow Patriarchate, during the millennial celebrations in that year. Saints Andrei Rublev, Xenia of Petersburg, Theophan the Recluse and others were glorified in the same observances.

Venerable Clement the Hymnographer
Holy New Martyr Argyra
Saint Donatus, Bishop of Euroea in Albania
Uncovering of the Relics of Saint Basil, Bishop of Amasea

Day 30-Apr-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Sunday of the Myrrh Bearing Women
Acts 6:17; Mark 15:43-16:8
Now, in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, a complaint arose from the Hellenistsb against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily service [of food distribution].
2The Twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, 'It is not appropriate for us to abandon the word of God in order to serve tables.
3Therefore, select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.
We will appoint them over this necessary task 4and devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.
5These words pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch.
6 They presented these men to the apostles who prayed and laid their hands on them.
7 Thus, the word of God spread and the number of disciples greatly multiplied in Jerusalem, and a large number of {Levitical} priests became obedient to the faith.

Gospel Reading: Sunday of the Myrrh Bearing Women

43 Joseph of Arimathea (a prominent council member who was also looking for the Kingdom of God), came forward.
He boldly went in to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body.
44 Pilate wondered if Jesus was already dead.
Calling the centurion, he asked him whether Jesus had been dead for a long time.
45 Having been assured of this by the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph.
46 Accordingly, Joseph bought fine linen, took Jesus down and wrapped him in the linen cloth.
Having placed him in a tomb which had been cut out of a rock, he rolled a stone against the door of the tomb.
47 Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Joses, saw where Jesus had been laid.
When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices in order to come and anoint him.

2Very early on the first day of the week, they arrived at the tomb when the sun had risen.
3They were saying among themselves, 'Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?' 4 But when they looked up, they saw that the stone was [already] rolled back, although it was extremely large.
5Entering into the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were amazed.
6 He said to them, 'Do not be amazed! You seek Jesus, the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen! He is not here! Behold, the place where they laid him! 7 But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He goes before you into Galilee. There you will see him, as he told you.
' 8 They went outb and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had come upon them.
They said nothing to anyone because they were afraid.

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING
Today we keep the commemoration of the Myrrh-bearing women: those women who went to the tomb of Christ very early in the morning and found it empty.
The Gospel set for today is from St Mark, but in fact all four Gospels record the event.
The basic story is as follows.
Several women disciples of Christ believed that he had been buried in a hurry and that more needed to be done for the burial to conform to the Jewish tradition for burials.
So they decided to go to the tomb very early in the morning.
Yet, when they arrived at the tomb they found that the stone that would have been rolled in front of the tomb had been rolled back and that the tomb was empty.
The accounts differ slightly in the gospel from this point onwards.
In St Mark the women find a young man dressed in white who tell them that the Lord is Risen.
In St Matthew they find an 'angel in garments as white as snow".
In St Luke there are two men in dazzling clothes: while in St John’s Gospel they do not find anybody in the tomb but St Mary Magdalene who stays behind finds the Saviour himself in the Garden and recognises him.
These differences should not worry us but should in fact encourage us because whenever several people are witnesses to an event they will all tell the story in a slightly different way.
And here the basic story is the same even if the details are not quite the same.

Then we are told that the women run away 'because they were afraid".
There are a number of other details that we should note.
First of all the stone rolled in front of the tomb is evidently a problem.
All the Gospels mention it in the light of astonishment that the stone was not in its place but had been rolled back.
Secondly, some of the gospels emphasise that the tomb was empty as the women are told to look at the place where He laid Jesus.
St John's Gospel goes further and mentions the grave clothes and tells us that it was St Peter himself who noted that the grave clothes were separated, the 'sheets" (othonia οθόνια) lying in one place and the 'napkin" (soudarion σουδάριον) in a different place by itself.
This latter detail is important because it gives rise to the question – What does someone want to take a naked corpse away for? Finally there is the issue of the guard set to ensure that nothing happened to the body of Jesus.
In fact this is only mentioned by St Matthew.
So, what conclusion can we draw from these stories? Quite a simple one really!
Each evangelist was recording details of a story told to them or remembered by them.
That the details are slightly different is proof that the essence of the story is true and that the fundamental point was that Christ was no longer in the tomb but had risen from the dead.
Subsequent stories tell us that Christ appeared in a number of different ways to his disciples.
So the Sunday of the Myrrh-bearers is given to us by the Church so that we may reflect on the truth of the Gospel and its main point: Christy is Risen! And all the rest of our Faith derives from that point.
Christ is Risen!

Day 01-May-2023 Monday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)

Holy Prophet Jeremiah (583 BC)

He is the author of the
Old Testament book that bears his name and of the Book of Lamentations; and Baruch, his scribe and disciple, composed the
Old Testament book that bears his own name. Jeremiah was the son of Helkiah, of the tribe of Levi, from the city of Anathoth in the land of Benjamin. He prophesied for thirty years, from 613 to 583 BC. When the Hebrew people were taken into captivity in the reigh of Zedekiah, the Prophet remained behind and mourned the downfall of the Jerusalem: this is the origin of the book of Lamentations. The Jews who remained fled into Egypt, forcibly taking Jeremiah and his scribe Baruch with them. In Egypt, his prophecies continued to disturb his own people, who stoned him to death by in 583.

His name means "The Lord is exalted." He is ranked second among the great Prophets, after Isaiah.

The holy Prophets and Forefathers, who lived before Christ's coming in the flesh are counted as Saints of the Church because they foresaw His coming, spoke of it in their prophecies, looked forward to it with Joy, and greeted Jesus as their Savior when he descended into Hades before his Resurrection.

Saint Tamara (Tamar), Queen of Georgia (1212)

'Saint Tamara was the only child of King George III. Upon his death in 1184, she became Queen at the age of twenty-four. Despite her youth, she ruled the country with such wisdom and godliness — leading it to unprecedented military triumphs over the neighboring Moslem countries in defence of her kingdom, fostering arts and letters, and zealously strengthening Orthodoxy — that her reign is known as the Golden Age of Georgia. After her coronation, she convoked a local council to correct disorders in church life. When the bishops had assembled from all parts of her kingdom, she, like Saint Constantine at the First Ecumenical Council, honoured them as if she were a commoner, and they Angels of God; exhorting them to establish righteousness and redress abuses, she said in her humility, "Do away with every wickedness, beginning with me, for the prerogative of the throne is in no

wise that of making war against God." Saint Tamara called herself "the father of orphans and the judge of widows," and her contemporaries called her "King" instead of "Queen." She herself led her army against the Moslems and fearlessly defeated them; because of the reverence that even the enemies of Georgia had for her, entire mountain tribes renounced Islam and were baptized. She built countless churches and monasteries throughout her kingdom, and was a benefactress also to the Holy Land, Mount Athos, and holy places in Greece and Cyprus. She has always been much beloved by her people, who have memorialized her meekness, wisdom, piety, obedience, and peace-loving nature in innumerable legends, ballads, and songs; the poem written in her honor by Shota Rustaveli, "The Knight of the Panther Skin," is the masterpiece of Georgian literature. The great Queen Tamara departed the earthly kingdom for the heavenly in the year 1212.' (Great Horologion)

Synaxis of the Three New Righteous Martyrs of the Holy Mountain, Euthymius, Ignatius, and Acacius (1814-1815)

All three were monks on Mt Athos. All three had renounced Christ in their youth and embraced Islam, but had repented and pursued the Christian life with fervor. All three, at different times, returned to Constantinople and declared themselves Christians, dooming themselves to death under Islamic law. Acacius's poor and pious mother told him, 'As you voluntarily denied the Lord, so you must now voluntarily and courageously receive martyrdom for our sweet Jesus.' All three were beheaded in Constantinople. The holy relics of all three are kept at the Skete of the Venerable Forerunner on the Holy Mountain, where they had been monks.

New Martyr Maria of Mirabella in Crete

Day 01-May-2023 Monday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)
Readings of the day: Acts 6:8-7:5, 47-60; John 4:46-54
8 Full of faith and power, Stephen performed great wonders and signs among the people.
9 But some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), along with Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and men from Cilicia and Asia reacted.
They began debating with Stephen, 10 but they were not able to withstand the wisdom and spirit by which he spoke.
11 Then, they secretly convinced [some] men to say, 'We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God!' 12 Having stirred up the people, the presbyters and the scribes came against Stephen and arrested him.
They brought Stephen before the Sanhedrin 13 and produced false witnesses who said, 'This man is always uttering blasphemies against this holy place and [against] the law.
14 We have even heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us!' 15 All the members of the council gazed at Stephen and saw that his face was like the face of an angel.
7 Stephen's discourse The high priest asked, 'Are these things so?' 2Stephen answered, 'Brothers and fathers, hear me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was [still] in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran.
3 And God said to him, 'Leave your land and your relatives, and come into a land which I will show you.
4 This is how Abraham came out of the land of the Chaldaeans and lived in Haran. From there, when his father was dead, God moved him into this land, where you are now living.
5 He gave Abraham no inheritance in this land, no, not so much as to set his foot on it.
But God had promised that he and his descendants would possess this land, even when Abraham was still without child.
47 Yet, it was Solomon who built him a house.
48 However, the Most High does not dwell in places made with hands, as the prophet says: 49 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is a footstool for my feet. What kind of house will you build for me?' says the Lord; 'or what is the place of my rest? 50 Did not my hand make all these things?' 51 You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit! As your fathers did, you do likewise.

52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They [even] killed those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One, of whom you have now become betrayers and murderers.
53 You received the law as it was ordained by angels, and did not keep it!' 54 Now, when they heard these things, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him.
55 But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.
56 He exclaimed, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!' 57 At this, they shouted with a loud voice, blocking their ears, and rushed at him with one accord.
58 So they threw him out of the city and stoned him.
The witnesses placed their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.
59 As they were stoning Stephen, he called in prayer, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!' 60 Kneeling down, he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them!' Having said this, he fell asleep.

Gospel reading:
45 When he arrived into Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast, for they also went to the feast.
46 Therefore, Jesus returned to Cana of Galilee where he had turned the water into wine.
Now, there was a certain royal official whose son was sick at Capernaum.
47 When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to him and begged him that he would come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.
48 Jesus then said to him, 'Unless you see signs and wonders, you will never believe!' 49 The nobleman replied, 'Sir, come down before my child dies.
50 Jesus told him, 'Go on your way.
Your son lives.
The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and he went on his way.
51 Even as he was on the way, his servants met him and told him the news: 'Your child lives!' 52 He asked them the hour when the boy had begun to get better.
Then, they told him, 'Yesterday at the seventh hour, the fever left him!' 53 And so, the father learned that it was at that [very] hour in which Jesus had said to him, 'Your son lives.
And he believed, along with his whole household.
54 This was the second sign that Jesus performed on his return from Judea into Galilee.

Day 02-May-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Holy Martyrs Hesperus, his wife Zoë, and their sons Cyriac and Theodulus (2nd c.)

Early in the second century a pagan named Catallus bought Hesperus, his wife Zoë, and their sons Cyriac and Theodulus as slaves. All of them were Christians, and would not eat anything that had been sacrificed to idols — they would throw all such food to the dogs and go hungry themselves. When Catallus learned of this, he was enraged and began to torture them cruelly, beginning with the children. When none of them could be moved from his confession of Christ, the entire family was cast into a hot furnace, where they gave up their souls to God. Their bodies remained unburnt.

Holy Tsar Boris-Michael of Bulgaria (907)

A son of the Bulgarian Khan Presian, he was instructed in the faith by St Photios, Patriarch of Constantinople. He labored throughout his reign to establish and spread the Christian faith in Bulgaria. When the disciples of Ss Cyril and Methodius were driven from Moravia and came to Bulgaria, he greatly assisted them in their missionary work there. He retired to a monastery, leaving rule of his country in the hands of his son Vladimir. But when he learned that Vladimir was persecuting Christians and trying to re-establish paganism, he left the monastery, took up the sword, overthrew his son, put his younger son Symeon on the throne and, when he was confident that the country was again in Christian hands, returned to the monastery, where he ended his life in peace and piety.

Translation of the Relics (1072 and 1115) of the Holy Passion-bearers Boris and Gleb, princes of Russia (1015)

For their lives, see July 24.

Translation of the Relics of St Athanasius the Great, patriarch of Alexandria

His main commemoration is January 18.

Holy Martyrs Hesperus, Zoe, Cyriacus and Theodulus

Day 02-May-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Acts 8:5-17; John 6:27-33

5 Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed Christ to them.
6 When the people heard and saw the signs which Philip was accomplishing, they agreed to listen to what he was preaching.
7 (Indeed, unclean spirits were expelled from many of those who had them, and they came out shouting with a loud voice.
Many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed, 8 and there was great joy in that city).
9 But there was a certain man, Simon by name, who used to practice sorcery in the city.
He amazed the people of Samaria, claiming to be a great one, 10 and all listened to him, from the least to the greatest.
They said, 'This man is the power of God, of the great kind!' 11 People listened to him because for a long time, he had amazed them with his sorceries.
12 But when they believed Philip [who was] preaching the Good News concerning the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.
13 Simon himself also believed and after his baptism, he followed Philip closely. Seeing that signs and great miracles were taking place, he was amazed.
14 Now, when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them.
15 When they arrived, they prayed for the people,a so that they might receive [the]b Holy Spirit 16 because the Holy Spiritc had not yet come upon any of them. (They had only been baptized in the Name of Christ Jesus).
17 Then, Peter and Johnd laid their hands on them, and they received [the] Holy Spirit.

Gospel Reading:

27 Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which remains to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you.
For the Father has sealed him – [even] God!' 28 As a result, they asked him, 'What must we do, that we may accomplish the works of God?' 29 Jesus replied, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent!' 30 So they said to him, 'What then do you do for a sign, so that we may see and believe you? What

work do you accomplish? 31 Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness! As it is written, 'He gave them bread out of heaven to eat.
'c 32 Jesus therefore said to them, 'Amen, amen, I tell you; it was not Moses who gave you the bread out of heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread out of heaven.
33 For the bread of God is what comes down out of heaven, and [it] gives life to the world.

Day 03-May-2023 Wednesday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)

Martyrs Timothy the Reader and his wife Maura of Antinoe in Egypt (286)

These holy martyrs were husband and wife. During the persecutions of Diocletian, the governor Arian demanded that Timothy hand over his sacred books (these were rare at that time, and as a Reader he was entrusted with their care). Timothy refused, saying that he would no more do so than a father would hand over his own children to death. He was brutally tortured and, when he refused to yield, the governor summoned Timothy's wife Maura, thinking that she would urge her husband to bow to the idols, but instead she confessed herself to be a Christian too. She in turn was subjected to many tortures, and finally the couple were crucified facing one another, where they hung for nine days, encouraging one another in the Faith, before they met their blessed end. They had been married for less than a month when they received their crowns.

St Theodosius, abbot of the Kiev Caves Monastery and founder of cenobitic monasticism in Russia (1074).

"Our righteous Father Theodosius was born in 1009, not far from Kiev, and brought up in Kursk. From early childhood he showed the wisdom of an elder, avoiding childish games and refusing to wear anything but the poorest of clothing. When he was about thirteen years old, and his father died, he began to humble himself even more, going out to work with the serfs in the field. His mother went so far as to beat him in her attempts to make him behave more respectably. Hearing of the labours of Saint Anthony of Kiev, he fled to him secretly and was accepted by him as his disciple. He was tonsured at the age of twenty-four by Saint Anthony's disciple Nicon, and was elected Abbot of the Caves Monastery in 1057, since Saint Anthony refused this out of humility, and lived his whole life as a hermit. It was Saint Theodosius who introduced in Russia the cenobitic rule of the Monastery of Studium in Constantinople, and under his guidance many monks attained to great holiness, and the monastic life spread. When Prince Svyatoslav drove out his elder brother the pious Prince Isyaslav, and ascended to the throne of Chernigov in his place, Saint Theodosius courageously rebuked him, and continued reproving him even when threatened with exile. At the request of Prince Shimon, the son of a Varangian (Viking) prince, the Saint wrote a prayer for the nobleman's forgiveness of sins, and, at his behest, had it placed in his coffin, whence arose this custom in Rusia. He reposed on May 3, 1074, being sixty-five years of age." (Great Horologion)

Day 03-May-2023 Wednesday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)
Readings of the day: Acts 8:18-25; John 6:35-39
18 Now, when Simon saw that the Holy Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, 19 saying, 'Give me also this power, so that whoever I lay my hands on may receive [the]f Holy Spirit!'
20 But Peter said to him, 'May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!
21 You have no part or share in this {ministry} because your heart is not right before God.
22 Repent of this wickedness of yours and ask God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.
23 Indeed, I see that you are in the poison of bitterness and in the bondage of wickedness!' 24 Simon answered, 'Pray for me to the Lord, that none of the things which you have spoken [may] happen to me.
25 After Peter and John had borne witness and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem and {on their way} preached the Good News in many villages of the Samaritans.

Gospel Reading:
35 Jesus told them, 'I am the bread of life! The one who comes to me will not be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.
36 But I told you that you have seen me, and yet, you do not believe.
37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and the one who is coming to me I will in no way reject.
38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but [to do] the will of the one who sent me.
39 This is the will of my Father who sent me: that of all he has given me, I should lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.

Day 04-May-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Our Holy Father Nikephoros the Hesychast (14th c.)

He was originally a Roman Catholic, but became Orthodox and lived in asceticism on the Holy Mountain as a monk. He was the spiritual father of St Gregory Palamas. His life was outwardly uneventful, and he reposed in peace in the 14th century. He left this very concise description of the hesychast's path:

"Gather your mind and compel it to enter into your heart and remain there. When your mind is firmly in your heart, it must not remain empty, but must incessantly make the prayer: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me!' And it must never fall silent. Through this the whole string of the virtues: love, joy, peace and the others, will make their abode in you, by which, then, every request of yours to God will be fulfilled."

Virgin-martyr Pelagia of Tarsus in Asia Minor (287)

She was born in Tarsus (home of the Apostle Paul). Though her parents were prominent pagans, she heard of Christ from Christians in that city, and her heart was filled with love for the Savior. The Emperor Diocletian visited Tarsus, and during his stay the Emperor's son and heir fell in love with Pelagia and wished to marry her. To her parents' complete amazement, Pelagia replied that she was already promised to her betrothed, Christ the Lord. She then fled her parents' house and went to the holy Bishop Linus, who instructed her in the Faith and baptized her. Pelagia then gave away all her many possessions, returned home, and told her parents that she was baptised. The Emperor's son, despairing of marryng her, killed himself. Pelagia's mother then denounced her daughter to the Emperor, who summoned her for trial. When Pelagia freely confessed her unwavering faith in Christ, the Emperor condemned her to be burned in a metal ox heated by fire. An account of her martyrdom says that, entering the ox with prayers of thanksgiving on her lips, she instantly melted like wax. Bishop Linus, who had baptised her, found a few of her bones and buried them on a hill near Tarsus. During the reign of the Emperor Constantine Copronymus (741-775), a church was built there in her honor.

St Monica, mother of Blessed Augustine (388)

Hilarion the Wonderworker

Hieromartyr Silvanus, Bishop of Gaza

Day 04-May-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Acts 8:26-39; John 6:40-44

26 Then, an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, 'Arise, and go toward the south, to the way that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.
This is a desert.
27 So Philip arose and went; and behold, there was a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians.
He was in charge of all her treasure and had come to Jerusalem to express adoration.
28 He was returning and sitting in his chariot, reading the prophet Isaias (Isaiah).
29 The Spirit said to Philip, 'Go near, and join yourself to this chariot.
30 Philip ran to the eunuch and heard him reading Isaias (Isaiah) the prophet.
He asked, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' 31 The man replied, 'How can I, unless someone explains it to me?' He then begged Philip to come up and sit with him.
32 Now, the passage of the Scripture which he was reading was this: He was led as a sheep to the slaughter.
As a lamb before his shearer is silent, so he does not open his mouth.
In his humiliation, his judgment was taken away.
Who will declare His generation? For his life is taken from the earth.
34 The eunuch asked Philip, 'Who is the prophet talking about? About himself, or about someone else?' 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture, he proclaimed {the Good News about} Jesus to this man.
36 As they went on the way, they arrived to [a place with] some water, and the eunuch said, 'Behold, here is water! What is keeping me from being baptized?' 37 Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.
The man answered, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God!'c 38 He commanded the chariot to stand still, and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.
39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away.
The eunuch did not see him any more and went on his way rejoicing.

Gospel Reading:

40 This is the will of the one who sent me: that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and this one I will raise up on the last day.

41 At this, the Jews began to murmur concerning him, because he had said, 'I am the bread which came down out of heaven.
42 They said, 'Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How then does he say, 'I have come down out of heaven?'
43 Therefore, Jesus answered them, 'Do not murmur among yourselves.
44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and this one I will raise up on the last day.

Day 05-May-2023 Friday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)

Great-martyr Irene of Thessalonica (4th c.)

"Saint Irene was the daughter of a princelet called Licinius; named Penelope by her parents, through a divine revelation she was brought to faith in Christ and at Baptism was renamed Irene. In her zeal for piety she broke in pieces all the idols of her father, who commanded that she be trampled underfoot by horses. But while she remained unharmed, one of the horses rose up and cast down her father, killing him. By her prayer she raised him to life again, and he believed and was baptized. Afterwards, in many journeyings, Saint Irene suffered torments and punishments for her faith, but was preserved by the power of God, while working dread miracles and converting many thousands of souls. At last she came to Ephesus, where she fell asleep in peace, in the first half of the fourth century. Two days after her death, her gravestone was found lifted off, and her grave empty. At least two churches were dedicated to St Irene in Constantinople, and she is the patroness of the Aegean island of Thera, which is commonly called Santorini, a corruption of "Saint Irene." (Great Horologion)

Note: The most famous Agia Irene church in Constantinople is not named after her, but for the Holy Peace (Greek Irene) of God, which is Christ.

The Prologue's account differs in several details. St Nikolai places St Irene in the Balkans in the town of Magedon, in apostolic times rather than the 3rd-4th century. In his account Irene learned the Christian faith from her teacher, Appelianus, and was baptised by the Apostle Timothy himself. He attributes the anger of Irene's father to her refusal to marry rather than her smashing the family idols (though of course she might have done both).

Martyrs Neophytus, Gaius and Gianus

Day 05-May-2023 Friday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)
Readings of the day: Acts 8:40-9:19; John 6:48-54
40 But Philip was found at Azotus.
Passing through [that area], he preached the Good News to all the cities, until he reached Caesarea.
9 Road to Damascus: Saul's conversion and baptism But Saul, still breathing threats and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest.
2 He asked him for letters to the synagogues of Damascus, [giving permission] that if he found anyone who belonged to 'the Way,' whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.
3 As Saul was on his journey and approaching Damascus, a light from heaven suddenly shone around him.
4 He fell on the earth and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' 5 He asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' The Lord answered, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.
6 Now arise, go into the city, and [there] you will be told what you must do.
7 The men who were travelling with Saul stood speechless, hearing the sound, but seeing no one.
8 Saul got up from the ground, and when his eyes were opened, he could not see anyone.
His fellow-travelers led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.
9 Saul was without sight for three days, and he neither ate nor drank.
10 Now, a certain disciple named Ananias lived in Damascus.
In a vision, the Lord said to him, 'Ananias!' Ananias answered, 'Behold, it is me, Lord!' 11 The Lord said to him, 'Arise, and go to the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judah for someone named Saul, a man of Tarsus.
For behold, he is praying, 12 and in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and laying his hands on him, so that he might receive his sight.
13 But Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard about this man from many, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem.
14 Here, he has authority from the chief priests to bind all those who call upon your Name!' 15 But the Lord said to him, 'Be on your way, for he is my chosen vessel to bear my Name before nations and kings, and to the children of Israel.
16 For I will show him how much he must suffer for my Name's sake.
17 Ananias departed and entered into the house.
Laying his hands on Saul, he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me, so that you may receive your sight and

be filled with the Holy Spirit!' 18 At once, something like scales fell from Saul'sa eyes, and he received his sight.
He arose and was baptized,

Gospel Reading:

48 I am the bread of life! 49 Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.
50 This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, its purpose is that anyone may eat of it and not die.
51 I am the living bread which came down out of heaven.
Anyone who eats of this bread will live forever!d Yes, the bread which I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.
52 At this, the Jews disputed with one another, saying, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' 53 Jesus therefore said to them, 'Amen, amen, I tell you; unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in yourselves.
54 The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

Day 06-May-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Righteous Job the Long-suffering

This icon of patient endurance in the face of all that God sends us lived near Arabia about 2,000 years before Christ. He was a descendant of Abraham through Esau. His prosperity, his calamitous sufferings, his patient endurance, and his restoration to health and riches are told in detail in the
Old Testament book that bears his name.

Some say that Job endured his sufferings for seven years before being restored to health and prosperity. Others say that all his sufferings occupied one year. The holy Fathers agree that Job for lived many years after his restoration, and died when he was more than 200 years old.

St Job, abbot and wonderworker of Pochaev (1651)

"Saint Job of Pochaev was born about 1551 in southwest Galicia of a pious Orthodox family. In his tenth year the Saint departed for the Ugornitsky Monastery of our Savior in the Carpathian Mountains. Tonsured after two years, he was ordained hieromonk about 1580. Renowned for his meekness and humility, Job was invited by the great zealot for Holy Orthodoxy in Carpatho-Russia, Prince Constantine Ostrozhky, to be Abbot of the Monastery of the Cross in Dubno. In his zeal for the preservation and propagation of the Orthodox Faith, and to counteract the propaganda of the Uniates, he printed and widely disseminated Orthodox spiritual and liturgical books. About 1600 he removed to the Mountain of Pochaev where at the insistence of the brethren, he became Abbot of the Monastery of the Dormition of the Theotokos, which he enlarged and made to flourish. Through his labours, a large printing works was founded at Pochaev and greatly assisted in the nurture of the Orthodox faithful in that region. His monastery became the center of the Orthodox Church in western Ukraine. The Saint reposed, having taken the schema with the name of John, in 1651, at the advanced age of one hundred." (Great Horologion)

Holy Martyr Barbarus the Soldier, with Bacchus, Callimachus and Dionysius (362)

He was a soldier in the Roman army during the reign of Julian the Apostate. Like many soldiers, he was a secret Christian, serving under the Imperial

commander Bacchus when his troops battled the Franks. A mighty Frankish soldier, like Goliath, challenged the Romans to send one of their company out to do single combat with him. The commander send Barbarus, who prayed to the Lord and overcame the Frankish giant, after which the Frankish army was easily vanquished. The commander then ordered a triumph in celebration of victory, including a public sacrifice to the Roman idols. At the sacrifice, the commander noticed that Barbarus was standing aside and asked him why: Barbarus revealed that he was a Christian and could not make sacrifice to the idols. The commander reported this to the unbelieving Emperor, who ordered that Barbarus be put to torture. Barbarus endured many cruel torments with serenity and courage. During his tortures, many wonders were seen, and many of his fellow-soldiers embraced the Christian faith. Three of these were Bacchus, Barbarus' commander; Callimachus; and Dionysius. All three were beheaded for confessing Christ, then Barbarus himself attained the Martyr's crown through beheading.

St. Sophia the Righteous (1974)

This holy ascetic, newly glorified in 2011, was born as Sophia Saoulidi in 1883 in Trebizond, Turkey. In 1907 she married, but her husband disappeared seven years later, leaving her with a newborn son. Not long afterward her beloved only son also died. Turning from the world, she placed all her trust in God, spending her time in solitary prayer on a mountain near her town.

In 1919 she arrived in Greece as part of the “exchange of populations” between Turkey and Greece. Not long after her arrival the Most Holy Theotokos appeared to her in a vision and said “Come to my house.” When Sophia asked her where to find her house, the Virgin replied “I am in Kleisoura.” Heeding these holy instructions, Sophia moved to the Monastery of the Nativity of the Theotokos in Kleisoura in northern Greece, where she remained for the rest of her life.

She never took monastic tonsure, but lived in the monastery kitchen. She slept only two hours a night, giving over the rest of the night to prayer. She dressed in old, tattered clothes, but if anyone tried to give her better clothing she would give it away to the poor. Similarly, if anyone gave her money, she would hide it until she could give it to someone in need. She ate very little and showed no interest in food. Worldly people called her “Crazy Sophia,” but those with discernment saw her as a living saint. She was endowed with gifts of healing and prophecy: when visitors would come to her she would greet them by name even if she had never met them before, and would describe their family problems, offering counsel.

In 1967 she was healed of a painful, life-threatening illness through a vision of the Holy Theotokos, the Archangel Gabriel and St. George. She fell asleep in the Lord on May 6 (New Calendar) 1974, after a long life given over to prayer, asceticism and utter poverty. Her relics are enshrined in the monastery where she spent most of her life.

Our Holy Father Seraphim the Struggler of Mount Domvu
Venerable Fathers Mamas, Pachomios and Hilarion

Day 06-May-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Acts 9:19-31; John 15:17-16:2

19 and after taking some food, he was strengthened.
After staying for several days with the disciples who were at Damascus, 20 Saul immediately went in the synagogues to proclaim that Christ is the Son of God.
21 All who heard him were amazed, and asked, 'Is this not the man who did such damage in Jerusalem to those who called on this Name? And had he not come here intending to bring them bound before the chief priests?' 22 But Saul grew even more in strength and confounded the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that [Jesus]b is the Christ.
23 After some time, the Jews conspired to kill Saul,c 24 but their plot became known to him.
Day and night, they watched the gates in order to be able to kill Saul, 25 but his disciples took him by night, and let him down through the wall, lowering him in a basket.
26 When Saul arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to join himself to the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he {truly} was a disciple.
27 Nevertheless, Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles.
Saul told them how he had seen the Lord on the way, that the Lord had spoken to him, and how at Damascus he had boldly preached in the Name of Jesus.
28 So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus.
f 29 He talked and debated with the Hellenists, but they tried to kill him.
30 When the brethren became aware of this, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him off to Tarsus.
31 And so, the Churches throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and were edified.
Walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they continued to grow.

Gospel Reading:

17 I command these things to you, so that you may love one another.
18 If the world hates you, you know that it has hated me before it hated you.
19 If you were of the world, the world would love its own! But you are not of the world, since I chose you out of the world, and so the world hates you.
20 Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his lord.

e If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.
If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.
21But they will do all these things to you on account of my Name, because they do not know the one who sent me.
22 If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have had sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin! 23 Whoever hates me also hates my Father.
24 If I had not accomplished among them the works which no one else had done [before], they would not have had sin.
But now, they have seen [those things] and yet they have hated both me and my Father.
25 But this has happened so that the word which was written in their law may be fulfilled: 'They hated me without reason.
26 When the Counselor has come, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me.
27 You also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.
'I have told you these things, so that you would not be caused to stumble.
2They will expel you from the synagogues! Yes, the time is coming when whoever kills you will think that he is offering {divine} service to God!

Day 07-May-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Commemoration of the Apparition of the Sign of the Precious Cross over Jerusalem in 351 AD

On this day in 351, during the reign of Constantius, son of Constantine the Great, the sign of the Cross appeared over Jerusalem. Cyril, Patriarch of Jerusalem, wrote "At about the third hour of the day [mid-morning] an enormous cross, formed of light, appeared in the heaven above holy Golgotha and reaching to the holy Mount of Olives, being seen not by one or two only, but manifest with perfect clarity to the whole multitude of the city; not, as one might suppose, rushing swiftly past in fancy, but seen openly above the earth many hours in plain sight, and overcoming the beams of the sun with its dazzling rays."

Our Holy Fathers of Georgia (6th c.)

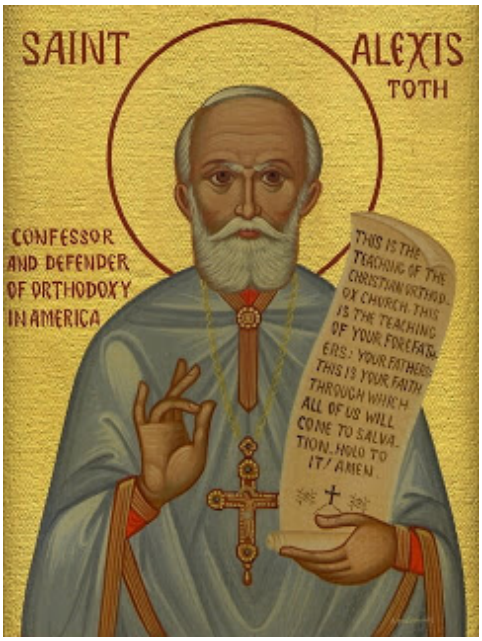
"In the sixth century, two hundred years after St Nina had preached the Gospel in Georgia, the most holy Mother of God appeared to John, an ascetic of Antioch, and commanded him to choose twelve of his disciples and go to Georgia, to strengthen the Orthodox faith there. John did so. Reaching Georgia, these twelve missionaries were formally welcomed by the prince of that country and the Catholicos, Eulalius, and immediately began their work with great zeal. The people gathered around them in hordes, and they strengthened them in the Faith with great wisdom and many miracles. The chief of these Christ-loving missionaries was St John of Zedan, and the names of the others were: Abidus, Antony, David, Zeno, Thaddeus, Jesse, Isderius, Joseph, Michael, Pyrrus, Stephen and Shio. With apostolic zeal, they all strengthened the Christian faith in Georgia, founded many monasteries and left many disciples to follow them. Thus they became worthy of glory in heaven and power on earth." (Prologue)

Martyr Acacius the Centurion at Byzantium (303)

He was an officer in the Roman army during the reign of the Emperor Maximian, and a Christian from his childhood. Summoned before the judges, he said that he had inherited a steadfast faith from his parents, and that he would not waver in it, having seen his faith confirmed many times in the

miracles worked by the relics of the Saints. He courageously endured torture in Pyrrinthus of Thrace, then was taken to Byzantium where, after further cruel tortures, he was beheaded.

St Alexis Toth of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania (1909) (April 24 OC)



This light of Orthodoxy in North America was born in Austro-Hungary in 1854, to poor Carpatho-Russian parents. His father was a priest in the Eastern-rite Roman Catholic church and, following in his father's footsteps, he was ordained in 1878. In 1889 he was appointed to serve as pastor to a Uniate parish in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Prompted partly by the strong hostility of the American Roman Catholic hierarchy at that time to Eastern-rite practices, he convened a meeting of about ten Eastern-rite priests in Wilkes-Barre Pennsylvania, where the divinely-led decision was made to seek to return to the Orthodox faith. Fr Alexis contacted Bishop Vladimir of the Russian church in San Francisco, who, in 1891, received Fr Alexis and 361 of his parishioners back into the faith of their ancestors.

From that time forward, Fr Alexis worked tirelessly, at great personal sacrifice, to proclaim the truths of the Orthodox faith, especially to those still attached to its mimic, Byzantine Catholicism. For long periods of time he received little or no salary and (despite claims that he had embraced Orthodoxy to enrich himself) worked in a bakery to support himself. Through his work, thousands of Christians in North America were led into the fullness of the Orthodox Faith during his lifetime.

St Alexis reposed in 1909. He was officially glorified in 1994. His holy relics can be venerated at St Tikhon's Monastery in South Canaan, Pennsylvania.

St Lydia of Philippi (1st c.)

She is mentioned in chapter 16 of the Acts of the Apostles. A seller of purple cloth and a believer in God, she was baptized along with her household by St Paul, who stayed at her house during his missionary travels. She is the first recorded convert to Christianity in Europe.

The Commemoration of Saints Raphael, Nicholas, Irene, and the other Newly-revealed Martyrs of Lesbos

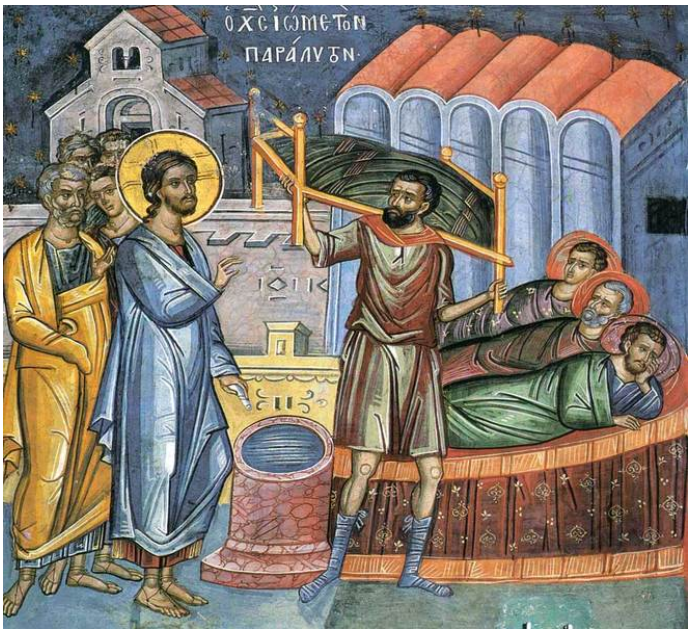
Day 07-May-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Sunday of the Paralytic
Acts 9:32-42; John 5:1-15
32 Now, as Peter was traveling through all those regions, he also came down to [visit] the saints who lived in Lydda.
33 There, he found a certain man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and who had been bedridden for eight years.
34 Peter said to him, 'Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you! Get up and make your bed!' And immediately, he arose.
35 All who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.
36 Now, there lived in Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, (which, when translated means Gazelle).
This woman was full of good works and acts of mercy.
37 But it happened that at this time, she became ill and died.
She was washed and placed in an upper room.
38 As Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, imploring him, 'Do not to delay in coming to help us!' 39 So Peter arose and went with them.
When he arrived, the disciples led him into the upper room.
All the widows stood by him weeping, showing [to Peter] the coats and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them.
40 But having put everyone out [of the room], Peter knelt down and began to pray.
Turning towards the body, he said, 'Tabitha, get up!' She opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up.
41 Then Peter gave her his hand and raised her up.
Calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive.
42 This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.

Gospel Reading: Sunday of the Paralytic

After these things, there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.
2 Now in Jerusalem, by the sheep gate, there is a pool with five porches called in Hebrew 'Bethesda.
3 Under these laid a great multitude of people who were sick, blind, lame, or paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water.
4 For an angel went down at certain times into the pool, and stirred up the water.



Then whoever stepped in first after the stirring of the water was made whole of whatever disease he had>.
5 A certain man was there, who had been sick for thirty-eight years.
6 When Jesus saw him lying there and perceivedb that the man had been sick for a long time, he asked him, 'Do you want to be made well?' 7 The sick man replied, 'Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming, someone else steps down before me!'
8 Jesus said to him, 'Arise, take up your mat, and walk!' 9 Immediately, the man was made well; he took up his mat and began to walk.
Now, it was the Sabbath on that day.
10 And so, the Jews said to the man who had been cured, 'It is the Sabbath! It is not lawful for you to carry the mat!' 11 The man answered them, 'He who made me well, that one said to me, 'Take up your mat, and walk.
' 12 Then they asked him, 'Who is the man who said to you, 'Take up your mat, and walk?" 13 But the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn in the crowd that was there.
14 Later, Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, 'Behold, you have become well.
Sin no more, so that nothing worse may happen to you!' The Jews begin to persecute Jesus 15 The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING

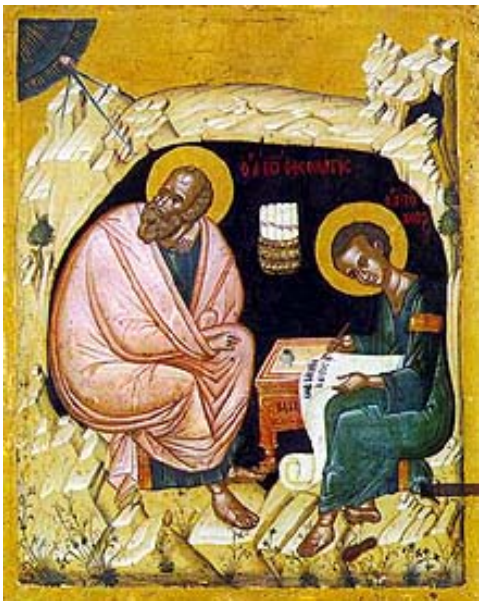
All too often as Christians, we are accustomed to think of healing (and of raising the dead) as belonging to the words and actions of Christ Himself as we read in today's Gospel.
It is easy to gloss over the idea that others can also perform these miracles, yet in the Epistle appointed for this day we encounter Peter, with his profound faith in Christ, calling upon the same Lord to restore the paralytic Æneas to health and then to raise up the much loved Tabitha from death.
But are such miracles confined to the pages of the Bible? Is there something wrong with the faith of the Christian that these things no longer happen? Surely not! For we have many examples to be found in the pages of history.
Let us take just two examples from our own times Saint Luke of Simferopol and

Crimea and Saint Iakovos of Evia.
In both cases their faith was profound yet utterly different; the one highly educated, a surgeon and latterly a bishop; the other a simple priest-monk.
Both trusted that God would hear their petition and complete the miracle.
Saint Luke expected God to guide his hands in surgery and his patients were restored to health when other surgeons would have admitted failure.
On the other hand, Saint Iakovos with his simple faith knew what was needed, called upon his much-loved saints, John the Russian and David of Evia, to go and work with whichever surgeon or doctor was performing the healing and guide their hands to a successful outcome.
In both cases it was their utter faith in Christ that brought happy conclusions to otherwise impossible situations.
We are reminded that if we have faith even as small as a grain of mustard (about 1mm diameter) we too can move the sycamore tree to the sea (Luk. 17:6). Such power is to be found in this tiny thing! So too, our faith: if it is genuine, if it be Apostolic in nature, no matter how tiny it may be, it will grow and become stronger so that the bearer will be capable of performing the most extraordinary miracles.
It is there in all of us – if only we would reach out to Christ and let Him into our hearts as did the Apostles and as do the Saints.
Where is our faith? Do we keep it tucked up in a corner of our brains to be brought out on special occasions – or do we let it live and grow in our hearts so that our whole life revolves around Christ Himself.
Perhaps we need to take that mustard seed off the shelf of our mind and plant it in our hearts where, watered with blood, sweat, tears; and above all love, it will grow and blossom.
Then, when we have cast out the last vestiges of pride and acquired a measure of humility our faith grows to the extent that miracles are possible – even for us!
Then, just maybe, when the time is right, our prayer is most fervent and our need is greatest, the miraculous may occur for us also.
It may not be earth-shattering, indeed, quite the opposite, it may be something that only we will ever know about, but miracle it will be, none-the-less, for Christ has heard our prayer and seen into the depth of our heart and what He sees is good..
Thus the ‘saint’ which lies dormant within us, comes to life and we become one with the Apostles and Saints and all the company of Heaven.
Fr Pancratios Sanders

Day 08-May-2023 Monday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)

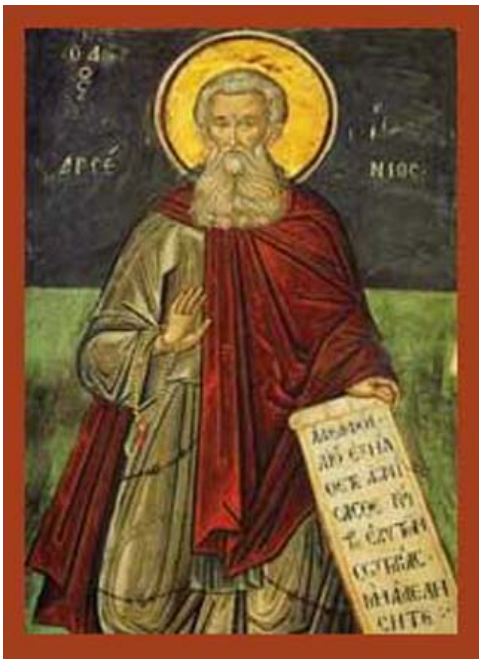
Holy Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian



The Apostle's main commemoration is September 26. Today is commemorated a miracle that took place at his grave every year on this date in Ephesus.

The Apostle reposed when he was more than one hundred years old; he was the only one of the Apostles not to die a martyr. Knowing that his death approached, he took seven of his disciples and told them to dig a grave in the form of a cross. He then lay down in the grave and died, and was buried by his disciples. When the faithful later opened his grave, they found it to be empty. But on this date every year a fine powder, called manna by the people, poured forth from the grave, and was used by the faithful for healing of ailments of body and soul.

Our Righteous Father Arsenios the Great (449)



He is one of the original and most honored Desert Fathers. Born of a noble family, he was a deacon and a courtier in Constantinople. One day he heard a voice saying "Arsenios, flee from men, and thou shalt be saved." He left the capital in secret and sailed to Alexandria, then journeyed to Skete in the Egyptian desert, where he became a monk. For years he was the disciple of St John the Dwarf. Even though he had already abandoned the world so dramatically, after some time in the desert he again heard a voice saying, "Arsenios, flee, be silent, pray always, for these are the causes of sinning not." He then separated himself from his brother monks and lived as a hermit, practicing silence. It was told of him that, on Saturday evenings, he would stand, turn his back to the setting sun, raise his hands in prayer, and pray without sitting down until the sun shone on his face the following morning. A

monk who came to visit him looked into his cell and saw Arsenios at prayer, his entire body glowing like a flame. He reposed in peace at the age of ninety-five.

St Emilia (375), mother of Sts Macrina, Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa, Peter of Sebaste, and Theosevia

She bore nine children, and imparted her Christian faith so effectively that five of them are counted as Saints of the Church: Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, Peter of Sebaste, Macrina and Theosevia. In her old age she founded a monastery, and lived in it with her daughter Macrina until her repose.

Day 08-May-2023 Monday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)
Readings of the day: Acts 10:1-16; John 6:56-69
10 Cornelius receives a vision Now, there was a certain man in Caesarea whose named was Cornelius.
He was a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, 2a devout man who feared God with his entire household.
He gave generous alms to the people and always prayed to God.
3 At about the ninth hour of the day, he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God coming to him, and saying to him, 'Cornelius!' 4Gazing at the angel and being quite alarmed, Cornelius said, 'What is it, Lord?' The angel replied, 'Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God.
5 Now, send men to Joppa, and get Simon who is called Peter.
6 He is staying with a certain Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside.
a 7 When the angel who had spoken to him had departed, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier from among his attendants.
8 Having explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.
Peter receives a vision, travels to Caesarea 9 Now, on the next day, as they were on their way and approached the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray at about noon.
10 He became hungry and desired to eat, but while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance.
11 He saw heaven opened and something like a great sheet let down on the earth by four corners and descending to him.
12 In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild animals, reptiles, and birds of the sky.
13 Then a voice came to him, 'Rise, Peter, kill and eat!' 14 But Peter said, 'Not so, Lord! I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean!' 15 Again, a second time, the voice spoke to him, 'What God has cleansed, you must not call unclean.
16 This happened three times, and immediately the vessel was taken up into heaven.

Gospel Reading:
56 The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood dwells in me, and I in him.
57 As the living Father sent me, and [as] I live because of the Father; whoever eats me will also live because of me.

58 This is the bread which came down out of heaven.
Unlike your ancestors [who] ate the manna and [still] died, whoever eats this bread will live forever!' 59 He said these things in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum.
60 Therefore, many of his disciples, when they heard this, said, 'This is a hard saying!g Who can listen to it?' 61 But knowing in himself that his disciples grumbled at this, Jesus said to them, 'Does this cause you to stumble? 62 What then if you would see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? 63 It is the spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing.
The words that I speak to you are spirit, and [they] are life.
64 But there are some of you who do not believe.
For Jesus knew from the beginning who were those who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.
65 He said, 'For this reason, I have told you that no one can come to me, unless it is given to him by my Father.
66 At this, many of his disciples left and no longer walked with him.
67 Then Jesus said to the Twelve, 'Do you also want to leave?' 68 Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life! 69 We have come to believe and know that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Day 09-May-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Translation of the relics of St Nicholas the Wonderworker from Myra to Bari (1087)

In 1087 the Saint's relics were taken from Myra in Lycia (on the southern coast of present-day Turkey) to the town of Bari in Italy. This was done due to a Muslim attack on Lycia. At that time Bari was Orthodox and under the administration of the Patriarch of Constantinople. The Saint's relics now lie in a Roman Catholic church in Bari; each year the casket containing the relics is opened by a Roman Catholic and Orthodox bishop together, and quantities of fragrant myrrh are removed, for the healing and encouragement of the faithful.

Holy Prophet Isaiah (7th c. BC)

He is counted as the greatest of the Old Testament Prophets. His incomparably beautiful verses foretell Christ in many places. He chastised, comforted, and counseled the pious king Hezekiah; but when he denounced the impiety and lawlessness of Hezekiah's son Manasseh, he was sawn in two outside Jerusalem, receiving a martyr's crown. His name means "The Lord is helper."

The Fifth Biblical Ode, "Out of the night my spirit waketh at dawn unto Thee, O God..." is taken from Isaiah.

Holy Martyr Christopher (3rd c.)

He was originally named Reprobus. In the time of the persecutions under the Emperor Decius, Reprobus, seeing the sufferings of the Christians, rebuked the rulers for their cruelty. The governor sent soldiers to arrest him, but he converted them and was baptised along with them, receiving the name Christopher. After he was brought before the governor, he was imprisoned with two harlots sent to seduce him, but he converted them also. He, the soldiers, and the former harlots were subjected to torture and finally beheaded.

It is this Saint Christopher who is portrayed on the medals often worn for protection in the Latin West. The image of him carrying the child Jesus comes from his name, which means 'Christ-bearer,' not from any incident in his life.

Kontakion

Thou who wast terrifying both in strength and in countenance, for thy Creator’s sake thou didst surrender thyself willingly to them that sought thee; for thou didst persuade both them and the women that sought to arouse in thee the fire of lust, and they followed thee in the path of martyrdom. And in torments thou didst prove to be courageous. Wherefore, we have gained thee as our great protector, O great Christopher.

Day 09-May-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Acts 10:21-33; John 7:1-13

21 Peter went down to [meet] the men and said, 'Behold, I am the one you are looking for! Why have you come?' 22 They replied, 'Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous man and one who fears God, someone well spoken of by all the nation of the Jews, was directed by a holy angel to invite you to his house and to listen to what you say.

23 Then Peter invited them in and gave them lodging.

On the next day, Peter arose and went out with them, and some of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

24 The following day, they entered into Caesarea.

Cornelius was waiting for them, having called together his relatives and close friends.

25 When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, fell down at his feet, and expressed adoration toa him.

26 But Peter raised him up, saying, 'Stand up! I am also a man!' 27 As he talked with Cornelius, he went in and found many people assembled.

28 Peter said to them, 'You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or visit someone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean.

29 Therefore, I have come without complaint when I was sent for.

And so, I ask, why did you send for me?' 30 Cornelius replied, 'Four days ago, I was fasting until this hour, and at the ninth hour, I was praying in my house.

And behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, 31 and he said, 'Cornelius, your prayer is heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God.

32 Therefore, send [messengers] to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter.

He is staying in the house of Simon a tanner, by the seaside.

When he comes, he will speak to you.

33 And so, I sent for you at once, and it was good of you to come! Now, we are all here present in the sight of God to hear everything that God has commanded you.

Gospel Reading:

7 The Feast of Tabernacles After these things, Jesus went about in Galilee; he did not wish to travel around in Judea because the Jews were seeking to kill him.

2Now, the feast of the Jews, the Feast of Tabernacles,c was at hand.

3 So his brothers said to him, 'Depart from here and go into Judea, so that your disciples may also see the works which you are accomplishing.
4Certainly, no one who seeks to be known openly does anything in secret! If you do these things, reveal yourself to the world!' 5For even his brothers did not believe in him.
6 Jesus therefore said to them, 'My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready.
7 The world cannot hate you, but it hates me, because I bear witness concerning it, that its works are evil.
8 You go up to the feast.
I am not yet going up to this feast, because my time is not yet fulfilled.
9 Having said these things to them, he remained in Galilee.
10 However, when his brothers had gone up to the feast, then he also went up, not publicly, but as it were, in private.
f 11 As a result, the Jews were looking for him at the feast, and they were asking, 'Where is he?' 12 There was much murmuring among the multitudes concerning him.
Some said, 'He is a good man!' Others replied, 'Not so, but he leads the multitude astray!' 13 Still, no one spoke openly about him for fear of the Jews.

Day 10-May-2023 Wednesday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)

Apostle Simon Zelotes

He was one of the Twelve. He was born in Cana of Galilee; some accounts say that he was the bridegroom at the wedding at Cana, where the Lord Jesus performed his first sign (John ch. 2). After receiving the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, he preached the Gospel in Africa; he was privileged to die by crucifixion, like his Lord.

Holy Martyrs Alphaeus, Philadelphus and Cyprinus of Sicily (251)

They were brothers living in southern Italy, of noble family and devout faith in Christ. (They were the sons of Vitalius, a pagan governor.) Arrested for their confession of Christ, they were taken before a series of judges, subjected to torture each time. Finally they were taken to Sicily and tortured to death there, during the reign of Licinius. Their incorrupt relics were found in 1517. They once appeared in a vision to St Euthalia (March 2).

St Isidora the Fool of Tabenna (Egypt) (4th c.)

She was a nun in a monastery in Egypt, and pretended madness and mental weakness in order to hide her virtues and her ascetic life. She did the dirtiest jobs, lived on scraps from the nuns' tables, and was despised by her sisters. An angel appeared to the ascetic Pitirim and revealed Isidora's true sanctity to him. He came to the monastery and, seeing Isidora, prostrated himself before her, at which she prostrated before him. When the sisters told him that she was mad, he answered "It is you who are mad: she is greater before God than either you or me. I only beg God to give me also that which is destined for her at the dreadful Judgement." At this, the sisters' eyes were opened, and they began to treat Isidora with honor. But she, to avoid being honored by anyone, fled the monastery and was not heard from again.

Blessed Thaïs (Taïsia) of Egypt (4th c.)

"Thaïs was a rich maiden, a Christian in Egypt. She decided not to marry, but to give her possessions to the hermit monks. But, when she had given away all her goods, she gave herself to a life of debauchery. Hearing of this, the hermits begged Abba John the Dwarf to do something, and he went to

Alexandria and began to weep in Thaïs' hearing. When she heard the old man weeping for her sins, she repented at once, left her house and everything she had and went into the desert after the saint. One night when she was sleeping and John was standing in prayer, he saw an angel in a nimbus of light coming down to take Thaïs' soul. And John saw that her sudden but deep repentance was more pleasing to God than the years-long but shallow repentance of many of the hermits." (Prologue)

Laurence of Egypt

Day 10-May-2023 Wednesday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)
Readings of the day: Acts 14:6-18; John 7:14-30
6 But Paul and Barnabas became aware of it and fled to the cities of Lycaonia,
Lystra, Derbe, and to the surrounding region.
7 There, they continued to preach the Good News.
8 At Lystra, there was a certain man sitting without strength in his feet.
He was a cripple from his mother's womb and he had never walked.
9 He was listening to Paul speak when Paul fixed his eyes on him.
Seeing that the man had faith to be healed, 10 Paul said with a loud voice, 'Stand
up on your feet!' And the man jumped up and began to walk.
11 When the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voice, shouting in
the language of Lycaonia, 'The gods have come down to us in the likeness of
men!' 12 They called Barnabas 'Jupiter' and Paul 'Mercury,' because he was the
chief speaker.
13 The priest of Jupiter, whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and
garlands to the gates, and they wanted to offer a sacrifice along with the crowd.
14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes
and rushed into the crowd, crying out, 15 'Friends, why are you doing these
things? We are men just like you, bringing you the Good News so that you should
turn away from these vain things toward the living God who made the heaven,a
the earth and the sea, and all that is in them.
16 In past generations, he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways.
17 However, he did not leave himself without witness: he did good and gave you
rains from the sky as well as fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and
gladness.
18 Even by saying these things, they could hardly prevent the multitudes from
offering a sacrifice to them.

Gospel Reading:
14 However, when it was the middle of the feast, Jesus went up into the temple
and began to teach.
15 At this, the Jews were amazed and said, 'How does this man have such
learning without having been educated?' 16 Jesus therefore answered them, 'My
teaching is not mine, but [it comes] from the one who sent me.
17 Anyone who desires to do God's will recognize the teaching, whether it is from
God, or if I am speaking from myself.

18 Whoever speaks from himself seeks his own glory, but he who seeks the glory
of the one who sent him is true, and [there is] no unrighteousness in him.
19 Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keeps the law? Why [then]
do you seek to kill me?' 20 The crowd replied, 'You have a demon! Who is seeking
to kill you?' 21 Jesus answered them, 'I did one work, and you all marvel because
of it.
22 Moses gave you circumcision (not that it is of Moses, but of the fathers), and on
the Sabbath, you circumcise a boy.
23 If a boy receives circumcision on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not
be broken, [why] are you angry with me because I made a man completely healthy
on the Sabbath? 24 Do not judge according to appearance, but make a right
judgment.
25 Then, some people from Jerusalem said, 'Is this not the one whom they seek to
kill? 26 Behold, he is speaking openly, and they say nothing to him! Could it be
indeed that the rulers acknowledge that this is truly the Christ? 27 However, we
know where this man comes from! But when the Christ comes, no one will know
where he comes from.
28 Then Jesus cried out as he was teaching in the temple, 'You both know me, and
know where I am from.
I have not come of myself, but he who sent me is true, and you do not know him.
29 I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me.
30 At this, they sought to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him because his
hour had not yet come.

Day 11-May-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Holy Equals-to-the-Apostles Methodius (885) and Cyril (869), first teachers of the Slavs

The two saints were brothers, born in Thessalonica. St Methodius, the elder brother, served as a soldier for ten years before becoming a monk. Cyril was librarian at the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople; then he too became a monk.

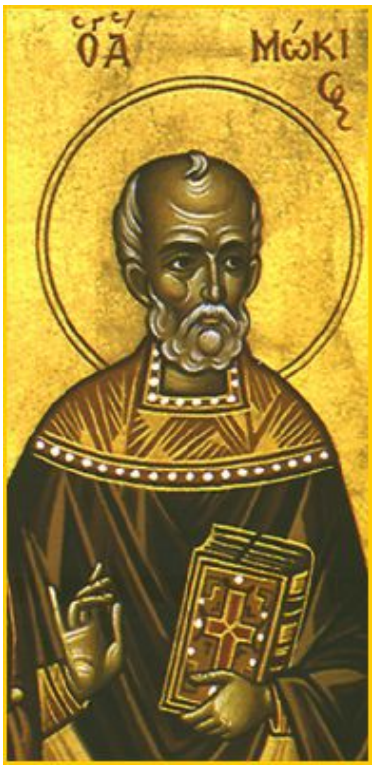
Their first missionary work was not among the Slavs: When the king of the Khazars (a Mongol people who then inhabited much of what is now Russia) petitioned the Emperor Michael to sent teachers to instruct his people, the Emperor chose Cyril and Methodius as his emissaries. They converted the Khazar king to the Christian faith, along with many of his nobles and commoners.

When King Rostislav of Moravia likewise sought teachers of the Christian faith, Cyril and Methodius were again sent forth. This time they devised an alphabet for the Slavic language and used it to translate many of the Greek service books into the language of the people. (In theory, the Orthodox people have always been privileged to hear the Church's services in their own tongue, though often attachment to dead languages has prevented this ideal from becoming reality.) Both brothers were repeatedly attacked by Germanic priests of the region, who opposed the use of the common tongue in the liturgy. At different times, both brothers were forced to appeal for exoneration and protection to the Pope of Rome, who supported them warmly each time.

After the two Saints reposed, attacks on their work continued, and their disciples were eventually driven from Moravia. The disciples, fleeing southward, found a warmer welcome among the southern Slavic peoples, and their work bore much fruit in Bulgaria (including modern-day Serbia) and other countries. And, of course, the alphabet that they devised, called Cyrillic after St Cyril, remains the standard alphabet of both the Slavonic service books of the Church and the Slavic languages of today.

† Holy Hieromartyr Mocius (288? 295?)

"The holy Hieromartyr Mocius, who was of Roman parents, lived during the reign of Diocletian, and was a priest in Amphilopolis of Thrace. One day as the



idolaters were assembled, and the Proconsul Laodicius was offering sacrifice to Dionysius, Mocius entered the temple and overturned the altar. After many torments, through which he was preserved whole by grace divine, he was sent to Byzantium, where he was beheaded about the year 288. Saint Constantine the Great built a magnificent church in honour of Saint Mocius in Constantinople, where his holy relics were enshrined. He is one of the Holy Unmercenaries." (Great Horologion)

The Prologue and St Herman Calendar give the date of his repose as 295.

Dioscoros, Martyr

Day 11-May-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Acts 10:34-43; John 8:12-20

34 Peter opened his mouth and said, 'Truly, I perceive that God does not show
favoritism; 35 but in every nation, whoever fears him and works righteousness is
acceptable to him.
36 God sent his word to the children of Israel, and the Good News of peace was
preached by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all.
37 You know what happened since the Good News was proclaimed throughout all
Judea, beginning from Galilee, after baptism was preached by John.
38 You know how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with [the]e Holy Spirit and with
power, how Jesus went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by
the devil, for God was with him.
39 We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in
Jerusalem.
They put him to death, hanging him on a tree, 40 but God raised him up the third
day and allowed him to be seen.
41 Yet, he was not manifest to all the people but [only] to witnesses who were
chosen beforehand by God, that is to us who ate and drank with him after he rose
from the dead.
42 He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one who
is appointed by God as the Judge of the living and the dead.
43 It is to him that all the prophets bear witness: that through his Name, everyone
who believes in him will receive remission of sins.

Gospel Reading:

12 Then again, Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world.
Whoever follows me will not walk in the darkness but will have the light of life.
13 At this, the Pharisees said to him, 'You bear witness to yourself! Your testimony
is not valid!true, because I know where I came from and where I am going.
But you do not know where I came from or where I am going.
15 You judge according to the flesh.
I judge no one.
16 Even if I do judge, my judgment is true, for I am not alone, but I am with the
Father who sent me.
17 It is also written in your law that the testimony of two people is truthful.
18 I am one who testifies about myself, and the Father who sent me [also] bears

witness to me.
19 At this, they asked him, 'Where is your Father?' Jesus answered, 'You do not know me nor my Father.
If you knew me, you would know my Father also.
20 Jesus spoke these words in the treasury, as he taught in the temple.
Yet no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.

Day 12-May-2023 Friday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)

Our Fathers among the Saints Epiphanios, bishop of Cyprus (403) and Germanos, Archbishop of Constantinople (740)

Saint Epiphanios was born a Jew in Palestine, but he and his sister came to faith in Christ and were baptized together. Epiphanios gave all his possessions to the poor and became a monk. He knew St Hilarion the great (October 31), and traveled among the monks of Egypt to learn their ways and wisdom. The fame of his virtue spread so widely that several attempts were made to make him bishop, first in Egypt, then in Cyprus. Whenever Epiphanios heard of these plans, he fled the area. He was finally made bishop by means of a storm: told to go to Cyprus, he took ship instead for Gaza, but a contrary wind blew his ship directly to Cyprus, where "Epiphanios fell into the hands of bishops who had come together to elect a successor to the newly-departed Bishop of Constantia, and the venerable Epiphanios was at last constrained to be consecrated, about the year 367." (Great Horologion). He guarded his flock faithfully for the remainder of his life, working many miracles, defending the Church against the Arian heresy, and composing several books, of which the best-loved is the Panarion (from the Latin for 'bread-box'), an exposition of the Faith and an examination of eighty heresies. He was sometimes called the 'Five-tongued' because he was fluent in Hebrew, Egyptian, Syriac, Greek, and Latin.

Saint Germanos was the son of a prominent family, in Constantinople. He became Metropolitan of Cyzicus, then was elevated to the throne at Constantinople in 715. It was he who baptized the infant Constantine, who for his whole life was nicknamed "Copronymos" because he defecated in the baptismal font (though he was neither the first nor the last infant to do so). At this incident, Patriarch Germanos is said to have prophesied that the child would one day bring some foul heresy upon the Church, which he did, becoming a notorious iconoclast as emperor. Germanos openly opposed the decree of the Emperor Leo the Isaurian which began the persecution of the

holy icons. For this he was deposed and driven into exile in 730. He lived the rest of his life in peace. Saint Germanos is the composer of many of the Church's hymns, notably those for the Feast of the Meeting in the Temple.

These two Saints are always commemorated together.

Pancras, Martyr

Day 12-May-2023 Friday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)
Readings of the day: Acts 10:44-11:10; John 8:21-30
44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the word.
45 The believers who had come with Peter and who were of the circumcision were amazed because the gift of the Holy Spirit was also poured out on the Gentiles.
46 Indeed, they heard them speaking in other languages and magnifying God.
At this, Peter said, 47 'Can anyone refuse the water to these people, seeing that they have received the Holy Spirit as well as we had, and say that they should not be baptized?' 48 He then ordered that they be baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ.
After this, they asked him to stay for a few days.
11 Peter returns to Jerusalem – He explains his actions in Caesarea Now, the apostles and the brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.
2When Peter returned to Jerusalem, those who were of the circumcision criticized him, 3saying, 'You went into the house of uncircumcised people and ate with them!' 4But Peter began to speak and explained things to them in order: 5'I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision: a certain container like a great sheet was let down from heaven by four corners, descending and coming down as far as me.
6 When I had looked intently at it and examined [it], I saw the four-footed animals of the earth, wild animals, creeping things, and birds of the sky.
7 I also heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter, kill and eat!' 8 But I said, 'Not so, Lord, for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered into my mouth!' 9 But a voice out of heaven answered me the second time, 'What God has cleansed, do not call unclean!' 10 This was done three times, and everything was drawn back into heaven.

Gospel Reading:
21 Then, Jesus spoke to them again, 'I am going away; you will seek me, and you will die in your sins.
Where I go, you cannot come.
22 At this, the Jews said, 'Will he kill himself, since he says, 'Where I am going, you cannot come?" 23 Jesus said to them, 'You are from below; I am from above.

You are of this world; I am not of this world.
24 I told you therefore that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am {the one}, you will die in your sins.
25 Therefore, they asked him, 'Who are you?' Jesus said to them, 'Just what I have been saying to you from the beginning! 26 I have much to say concerning you and [much] to condemn.
However he who sent me is true; and the things which I heard from him, these [things] I say to the world.
27 They did not understand that he spoke to them about the Father.
28 So Jesus said to them, 'When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am {he}.
e I do nothing of myself, but as my Father taught me, this is what I proclaim.
29 The one who sent me is with me.
The Father has not left me alone because I always do the things that are pleasing to him.
30 As he spoke these things, many believed in him.

Day 13-May-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Holy Virgin-martyr Glykeria at Heraclea (141).

At a pagan festival in Thrace, when the Governor of the region was offering sacrifice to the idols, St Glyceria entered the temple and declared herself to be a handmaid of Christ. When the governor commanded her to make sacrifice to the gods, she overturned the statue of Zeus, smashing it to pieces. For this, and for her continued refusal to deny her faith, she was seized and subjected to many tortures. First, the governor had her sealed in a prison cell with the intention of starving her to death; but an angel appeared to Glykeria and gave her heavenly food. When enough time had passed that the governor was certain that Glykeria had perished, he opened her cell, and all present were astonished to see her alive, healthy and full of joy. At this her jailer, Laodicius, confessed Christ and was beheaded. Glykeria was then thrown into a fire, but stood in it unharmed, praising God like the Three Children in Babylon. Finally she was cast to wild beasts, where she gave up her soul to God. A healing myrrh flowed from her relics.

Holy Martyr Alexander of Rome (298)

He was an eighteen-year-old soldier in the army of the Emperor Maximian. When a public sacrifice was made to the Roman idols, Alexander refused to take part, for which he was brought before the Captain Tiberian, who told him he must either deny Christ or die. When he stood fast for Christ, he was arrested and taken through Macedonia to Byzantium, being cruelly tortured at every stop along the way. But everywhere he went, the Christians flocked to him, encouraging him and asking his blessing. His mother, Pimenia, travelled with him for the entire journey. In all his sufferings, Alexander was visited many times by an angel of God, who relieved his pain and encouraged him. As his Lord had commanded, Alexander loved and prayed for his enemies: At a place called Carasura, when the soldiers guarding him were suffering from thirst, he prayed, and a spring of cold water burst out of a dry place.

Finally, on the bank of the river Ergina, Tiberian ordered that Alexander be beheaded. As the executioner raised his sword, he saw radiant angels of God

all around the holy Martyr, and was afraid to strike. Alexander asked the executioner why he had stayed his hand and, hearing the answer, prayed to God that he might send the angels away so that the executioner would not be afraid. The angels vanished, and Alexander received his crown of martyrdom. Pimenia, his mother, buried her son's body, and many miracles of healing were worked at his grave. Some time later, Alexander appeared to his mother and told her of her approaching death, which occurred not long afterward.

Sergios the Confessor

Day 13-May-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Acts 12:1-11; John 8:31-42

12 About that time, King Herod took actions to oppress some of the [members of the] Church.
2 He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword.
3 When Herod saw that it pleased the Jews, he went on to arrest Peter as well. (This was during the days of unleavened bread).
4 After arresting Peter, he put him in prison and delivered him to four squads of four soldiers to guard him, intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover.
5 And so, Peter was kept in the prison, but constant prayer was made by the Church to God for him.
6 The same night, when Herod was about to bring him out, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, while guards in front of the door were keeping watch over the prison.
7 Suddenly, an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shone in the cell. Stricking Peter on the side, he woke Peter up, saying, 'Stand up quickly!', and Peter's chains fell off from his hands.
8 The angel said to him, 'Get dressed and put on your sandals!' and Peter did so. Then the angel said, 'Put on your cloak and follow me!' 9 Peter went out and followed the angel, but he did not realize that what was being done by the angel was real, thinking that he was seeing a vision.
10 When they were past the first and second guard, they arrived at the iron gate which leads into the city, and it opened to them by itself.
Having gone through, they went down one street, and immediately the angel departed from him.
11 When Peter came to himself, he exclaimed, 'Now I truly know that the Lord has sent out his angel and delivered me out of the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.

Gospel Reading:

31 Jesus therefore said to those Jews who had believed him, 'If you remain in my word, then you are truly my disciples.
32 You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free!' 33 They answered him, 'We are Abraham's seed and have never been in bondage to anyone.
How can you say, 'You will be made free?" 34 Jesus answered them, 'Amen,

amen, I tell you; everyone who practices sin is the slave of sin! 35 A slave does not live in the house forever, [but] a son remains forever.
36 If therefore the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed! 37 I know that you are Abraham's seed, yet you seek to kill me, because my word finds no place in you.
38 I speak of what I have seen with my Father; and you also do the things which you have seen with your father.
39 They answered him, 'Our father is Abraham!' Jesus said to them, 'If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham.
40 But now, you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God! Abraham did not do this.
41 You do the works of your father.
They replied to him, 'We were not born of sexual immorality! We have one father, God.
42 Therefore, Jesus said to them, 'If God were your father, you would love me, for I issue forth [from God] and have come from God.
Indeed, I have not come of myself, but he has sent me.

Day 14-May-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Martyr Isidore of Chios (251)

A devout Christian from his early youth, he was kidnapped from his native Chios and impressed into the army. When he openly confessed himself a Christian, his commander ordered him to make sacrifice to the gods. When he resolutely refused, the commander ordered him to be beaten with iron flails, then had his tongue cut out. But even without a tongue, Isidore was miraculously enabled to speak, and clearly proclaimed the name of Christ. At the same moment, the commander was struck mute. The commander then ordered by signs that Isidore be beheaded. Isidore went to his death rejoicing and praising God. This occurred during the persecutions of the Emperor Decius.

Our Holy Father Serapion the Sindonite (5th c.)

" 'Sindon' means 'linen cloth,' and this saint was called 'the Sindonite' because he covered his naked body only with a linen cloth. He carried the Gospels in his hand. Serapion lived like the birds, with no roof and no cares, moving from one place to another. He gave his linen cloth to a poor wretch who was shivering with cold, and himself remained completely naked. When someone asked him: 'Serapion, who made you naked?', he indicated the Gospels and said: 'This!' But, after that, he gave away the Gospels also for the money needed by a man who was being hounded to prison by a creditor in debt. [note: Gospel books were all hand-written, and were uncommon and valuable.] At one time in Athens, he did not eat for four days, having nothing, and began to cry out with hunger. When the Athenian philosophers asked him what he was shouting about, he replied: 'There were three to whom I was in debt: two have quietened down, but the third is still tormenting me. The first creditor is carnal lust, who has tormented me from my youth; the second is love of money, and the third is the stomach. The first two have left me alone, but the third one still torments me.' The philosophers gave him some gold to buy bread. He went to a baker, bought a single loaf, put down all the gold and went out. He went peacefully to the Lord in old age, in the 5th century." (Prologue)

Blessed Isidore the Fool for Christ (1484)

He was German by birth but, drawn to the Orthodox faith, he moved to Rostov and not only became Orthodox, but took on the podvig of folly for Christ. He lived in complete destitution, spending the days pretending madness and the nights in prayer. Many wonders were performed by this Saint even in his

lifetime. When he died in his meager hut in 1484, the people of Rostov smelled a fragrant odor throughout the city. A merchant whom he had miraculously saved from drowning built a church in the place where his hut had stood.

Hieromartyr Therapontus

Day 14-May-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

The Samaritan Woman
Acts 11:19-26, 29-30; John 4:5-42

19 Now, those who had been scattered abroad by the oppression that arose in connection with Stephen had traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, and they were only proclaiming the word to Jews.
20 But some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, spoke to the Greeks and preached the Lord Jesus when they arrived in Antioch.
21The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.
22 News of these things came to the ears of the Church which was in Jerusalem. So, they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch.
23 When he arrived and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced.
He encouraged them all to remain close to the Lord with a resolute heart.
24 Indeed, Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and many people were added to the Lord.
25 Then Barnabas went out to Tarsus to look for Saul, 26 and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch.
So it was that for a whole year, they assembled with the Church and taught many people.
The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.
29 According to their ability, each one of the disciples determined to send relief to the brethren who lived in Judea.
30 This is indeed what they did, sending their gift to the presbyters through the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

Gospel Reading: The Samaritan Woman

5 And so, he arrived at a city of Samaria called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph; 6 and Jacob's well was there.
Jesus, tired from his journey, sat down by the well.
It was about the sixth hour.
7 A woman of Samaria came to draw water.
Jesus said to her, 'Give me [something] to drink.
8 (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food).

9 The Samaritan woman then
said to him, 'How is it that you,
being a Jew, ask for a drink from
me, a Samaritan woman?' (For
Jews have no dealings with
Samaritans).
10 Jesus answered her, 'If you
knew the gift of God, and who it is
who says to you, 'Give me a
drink,' you would have asked him,
and he would have given you
living water!' 11 The woman
replied, 'Sir, you have nothing to
draw [water] with, and the well is
deep! Where then do you get that
living water? 12 Are you greater
than our father Jacob who gave us the well and drank of it himself, as did his
children and his livestock?' 13 Jesus replied, 'Everyone who drinks of this water
will be thirsty again! 14 But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will
never be thirsty again.
Not only this, the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water
springing up to eternal life.
15 The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty
or come all the way here to draw [water]!' 16 Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your
husband, and come here.
17 The woman answered, 'I have no husband.
Jesus replied, 'You said well, 'I have no husband,' 18 for you have had five
husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband.
This you have said truthfully.
19 The woman said to him, 'Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet! 20 Our
ancestors expressed adoration on this mountain, and you Jews say that Jerusalem
is the place where people should express adoration.
21 Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, a time is coming when neither in this
mountain nor in Jerusalem will you express adoration to the Father.
22 You express adoration to what you do not know.
We express adoration to what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.
23 But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will express
adoration to the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such [people] to
express adoration to him.
24 God is a spirit, and those who express adoration to him must express adoration
in spirit and truth.
25 The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah f is coming, (he who is called
Christ).

When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.
26 Jesus replied, 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you.
27 Just then, his disciples arrived.
They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, yet no one said, 'What are you looking for?' or, 'Why do you speak with her?' 28 Then, the woman left her water jar, went away into the city, and said to the people, 29 'Come, see a man who told me everything I have done! Could this be the Christ?' 30 The people [then] went out of the city, and were coming to him.
31 Meanwhile, the disciples urged him, saying, 'Rabbi, eat!' 32 But he told them, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.
33 The disciples then said one to another, 'Has anyone brought him something to eat?' 34 Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of the one who sent me, and to accomplish his work.
35 Do you not say, 'There are still four months until the harvest comes?' Behold, I tell you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields! They are already white for the harvest! 36 [Already], the one who reaps is receiving his wages and gathering fruit to eternal life; so that both the one who sows and the one who reaps may rejoice together! 37 For in this, the saying is true, 'One sows, and another reaps.
38 I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored.
Others have labored, and you have entered into [the rewards of] their labor.
39 Many of the Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the word of the woman who had testified, 'He told me everything that I did!' 40 For this reason, when the Samaritans came to him, they begged him to stay with them.
So, he stayed there two days, 41 and many more believed because of his word.
42 Then they said to the woman, 'Now we believe, not because of what you said, but because we have heard for ourselves and [we] know that this is indeed the Savior of the world, the Christ.

SSERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING
The Gospel for today is the well known and loved passage concerning the Samaritan woman, who Tradition remembers as St Photini.
St John’s Gospel is very carefully crafted with often several layers of meaning and this passage is an excellent example of this.
In the first place we are told that the action takes place at Jacob’s well.
Jacob is of immense importance to Jews as he was their universal ancestor, and his name was changed by God to 'Israel" after which the whole Nation became known as Israelites.
However in this passage we are to think also of two encounters that Jacob had with God.
The first was when he dreamed of the ladder going up to heaven with the angels coming and going (Gen.
28:11-15) , and then the time when he wrestled with God after which his name was changed.

(Gen.
32:24-29). Therefore by the very name of the place, St John is preparing us for an encounter with God.
At first the woman, a Samaritan, is entirely concerned about material things. Initially with water and then how Christ is to get water out of the well.
The Lord however, uses these material ideas to teach about spiritual realities: the water becomes the water of eternal life, so we think immediately of Baptism and then how we are to be sustained eternally by the Holy Spirit.
The woman however is not as materially bound as at first appears.
When the conversation starts she calls Christ 'Lord" which could be merely good manners, but also suggests that she, even at this stage, realises that there is much more to the person she is speaking to, than at first appears.
Following the revelation that Christ knows how many husbands she has, she concludes that Christ must be a prophet.
This is an opportunity not to be missed! So she starts to ask all the questions that she would like the answer to, and starts with the issue that divided the Jews and the Samaritans: which temple was the true temple? Where is it that God actually dwells? – In the temple on Mt Zion in Jerusalem or the Samaritan temple on Mt Gerizim in Samaria? Once again the Lord's answer takes the woman to a new level, a new kind of worship when God will be worshipped everywhere 'In Spirit and in Truth".
And here the very word 'Truth" reminds us that Christ is Himself the Truth: 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life".
A concept that is finally revealed at the Lord's trial, when Pontius Pilate standing face to face with the answer, asks the question 'What is Truth?' Finally St John uses the passage to tell us quite explicitly who the Lord is.
The woman says 'I know that the Messiah is coming.... He will announce to us all things.
' Jesus said to her 'I am (ego eimi) the One, that now speaks to you.
' (This reflects the question that Moses asked God out of the Burning Bush and Rwas told 'ego eimi o wn" – 'I am the One who is"). However she is not yet quite convinced for when she goes into the city, she tells the people to go and see Jesus and asks them the question 'This one is not the Christ is he?' The Greek uses the word Μητι which implies uncertainty.
But after they have met the Lord, they say to her 'We no longer believe because of what you said: for we ourselves have heard, and we know that this one is truly the Saviour of the World, the Christ".
Thus the Fathers giving us this reading today demonstrate the Truth of our Faith. Jesus is Christ God, the one who saves.
Christ is Risen!

Day 15-May-2023 Monday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)

St Pachomius the Great, founder of cenobitic monasticism (346)

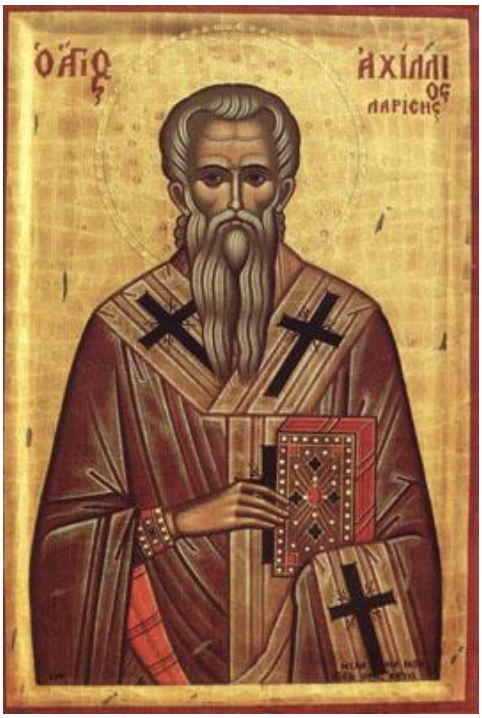
His name in his native Coptic, Pachom, means "eagle." He was an Egyptian pagan who entered the Roman army at a young age. While quartered at Thebes, he was amazed at the kindness of the local Christians, who brought food and drink to the soldiers. Learning who they were, he believed in Christ and vowed, once released from the army, to serve him for the rest of his life. At the end of his military service, he was baptised and became the disciple of the hermit Palamon, with whom he lived for ten years.

At a place called Tabennisis an angel appeared to him dressed in the robes of a monk and gave him a tablet on which was written a rule for a cenobitic monastery — one in which the brethren live communally rather than as hermits, something that had not been seen before among Christians. The angel commanded him to found such a monastery. Pachomius set to work, building many cells though there was no one to live there but himself and his brother John. When John questioned the unnecessary building, Pachomius only said that he was following God's command, without saying who would live there or when.

But soon men began to assemble there, and in time so many came to be his disciples that he eventually founded nine monasteries housing thousands of monks. The rule that he gave (or had been given) for these monasteries became the model for all communal Christian monasticism thereafter. St Pachomius reposed in 346, before his great Egyptian fellow-strugglers St Anthony the Great and St Athanasius the Great.

Entertaining angels unawares: Christian believers' simple acts of kindness toward their pagan oppressors may have seemed foolish to many, but it was such acts that opened the eyes of Pachomius to the light of Christ, and which bore incalculably great fruit: the founding of the monastic life which is still the backbone of Christ's Church.

Our Father among the Saints Achillius, Bishop of Larissa (330)



He was born in Cappadocia, and was one of the 318 God-bearing Fathers who attended the First Ecumenical Council. At the council, Achillius took up a stone and said to the Arians, 'If Christ is a creature of God, as you say, tell oil to flow from this stone.' When the heretics kept silent, Achilleus went on, 'And if the Son of God is equal to the Father, as we believe, let oil flow from this stone,' at which oil flowed out. Returning to Larissa, the holy bishop cast down many pagan temples, built many churches, cast out many demons, and reposed in peace.

Barbaros the Myrrh-gusher

Day 15-May-2023 Monday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)
Readings of the day: Acts 12:12-17; John 8:42-51
12 After pondering on this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and praying.
13 When Peter knocked at the outer gate, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer.
14 When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed that she did not open the door! Instead, she ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate.
15 But they said to her, 'You are crazy!' When she insisted that it was so, they said, 'It is his angel!' 16 Meanwhile Peter continued knocking.
When they opened [the door], they saw him and were amazed.
17 But he motioned them with his hand to be silent and told them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison.
He said, 'Tell these things to James, and to the brethren.
Then he departed, and went to another place.

Gospel Reading:
42 Therefore, Jesus said to them, 'If God were your father, you would love me, for I issue forth [from God] and have come from God.
c Indeed, I have not come of myself, but he has sent me.
43 Why do you not understand my speech? Because you cannot hear my word! 44 You are of your father, the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father.
He was a murderer from the beginning and he does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him.
When he utters a lie, he speaks of his own because he is a liar and the father of lies.
45 But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me.
46 Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?
47 Whoever is of God hears the words of God.
For this reason, you do not hear: because you are not of God.
48 Then the Jews answered him, 'Do we not say well that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?' 49 Jesus replied, 'I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me.
50 However, I do not seek my own glory.

There is one who seeks and judges.
51 Amen, amen, I tell you; whoever keeps my word will never see death.

Day 16-May-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Our Holy Father Theodore the Sanctified (368), disciple of St Pachomius the Great

He was born and raised an unbeliever, but came to faith in Christ as a young man. Not long after being baptised, he heard of Pachomius (May 15) and fled to join him in the desert. Saint Pachomius accepted Theodore as a monk and, because of his humility and obedience, came to esteem him most highly of all the brethren. Theodore's sister joined him in the desert, taking up life in a women's monastery and becoming its abbess. When their mother came to bring them back from the desert, she in turn was persuaded to stay in the women's monastery as a monastic. Finally, Theodore's brother Paphnutius also came to the monastery and was tonsured.

Once the Bishop of Panopolis asked Saint Pachomius to build a monastery for him; Pachomius entrusted Theodore to carry out the work. Some of the brethren grumbled at the authority given to Theodore, for he was younger than many of them; but St Pachomius said: 'Theodore and I fulfill the same service for God; and he also has the authority to give orders as father.' When St Pachomius reposed, he left St Theodore to be spiritual father to the monasteries that he had founded, a task which he faithfully fulfilled until his death at a great age.

St Nicholas Mystikos, Patriarch of Constantinople (930)

He was known for the purity and austerity of his life. When the Emperor Leo VI married a fourth time (his three previous wives having died), the Patriarch barred him from the church. The Emperor sent the Patriarch into exile and had his marriage approved by delegates of the Roman Pope. When the Emperor died, Nicholas was restored to the Patriarchal throne, and called a Council in 925, at which fourth marriages were forbidden in the Church under any circumstance. He died peacefully.

The title Mystikos was given to some high-ranking members of the Imperial council (perhaps because they met in secret). The Patriarch was a courtier with this title before he forsook the world and was tonsured a monk.

Note: From early times, the Eastern and Latin churches have differed in their views on marriage. The Latin church held, and still holds, that marriage is dissolved by death, so in theory any number of re-marriages is permissible (a view that the Emperor Leo sought to exploit). The Eastern Church has traditionally been uncomfortable with any second marriage — some of the Fathers even call the re-marriage of widows or widowers "bigamy". Still the

Eastern church tolerates re-marriage (even after divorce) as a concession for the salvation of those who cannot sustain the single state.

Blessed Musa the Maiden (5th c.)

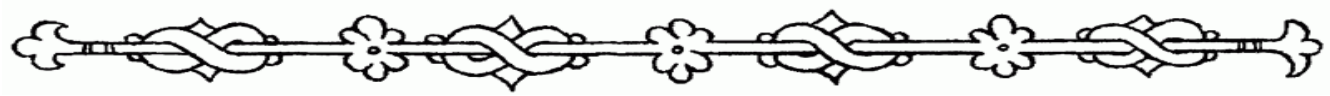
"St Gregory the Dialogist relates of her that she was a mere nine years old when the most holy Mother of God appeared to her on two occasions, surrounded by virgins bathed in light. When Musa expressed her desire to be included in the resplendent company of the Queen of heaven, the Mother of God told her that she would come for her and take her within a month, outlining for her how she should spend those thirty days. On the twenty-fifth day, Musa took to her bed and on the thirtieth day the most pure and holy Mother again appeared to her, calling to her in a quiet voice, to which Musa replied: 'Here I am waiting, my Lady! I'm ready!', and she breathed forth her spirit. She passed from this life to life eternal in the fifth century." (Prologue)

St Brendan the Voyager, abbot of Clonfert (~577)

He was born around 484 at Tralee in Kerry, Ireland. He founded several monasteries in Ireland, of which the chief was Cluain Ferta Brenaind (anglicized as Clonfert) in County Galway. His missionary and pastoral travels took him on voyages to the Scottish islands, and possibly to Wales; thus in his own time he was known as 'Brendan the Voyager.' He reposed in peace.

Early in the ninth century, a Latin saga, Navigatio Brendani (The Voyage of Brendan) made him the hero of a Christian adventure that included voyages to unknown lands far to the west of Ireland. The account provides strong evidence that Irish voyagers visited America as early as the 8th century, before the Vikings; but whether St Brendan himself made these voyages is disputed.

Monk-martyr Peter of Blachernae



Day 16-May-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Acts 12:25-13:12; John 8:51-59

25 After completing their service, Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem,
and they also took with them John whose other name was Mark.

13 Now, in the Church that was at Antioch, there were some prophets and
teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen the
foster brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

2As they were liturgizing to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for
me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.

3 Then, after fasting and praying, they laid their hands on Barnabas and Saul and
sent them on their way.

4Being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there
sailed to Cyprus.

5When they were at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish
synagogues, with John as their attendant.

6 After going through the island to Paphos, they met a certain sorcerer, a false
prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar Jesus.

7 He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus.
Being an intelligent man, the proconsul called Barnabas and Saul in order to hear
the word of God.

8 However, Elymas the sorcerer (this is his name when translated) opposed them,
seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.

9 But filled with the Holy Spirit, Saul (who is also called Paul), fixed his eyes on
Elymas 10 and said, 'You are full of all [kinds of] deceit and cunning, you son of the
devil and enemy of all righteousness! Will you not stop perverting the right ways of
the Lord? 11 And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is against you! You will be
blind, unable to see the sun for a season!' At once, mist and darkness fell upon
Elymasa, and he began to grope around seeking someone to lead him by the
hand.

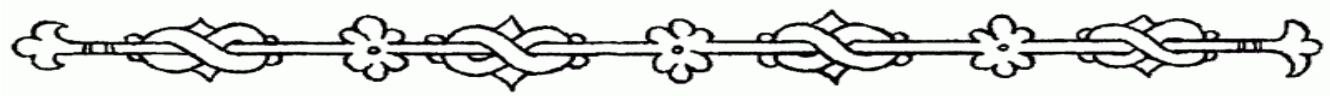
12 When the proconsul saw what had taken place, he believed and was amazed
by the teaching of the Lord.

Gospel Reading:

51 Amen, amen, I tell you; whoever keeps my word will never see death.

52 At this, the Jews said to him, 'Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham
died, and [so did] the prophets; and [yet] you say, 'whoever keeps my word will

never see death.
53 Are you greater than our father, Abraham, who died? The prophets died [as well].
Who do you claim to be?' 54 Jesus answered, 'If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing.
It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say that he is our God.
55 You have not known him, but I know him.
If I said, 'I do not know him,' I would be like you, a liar.
But I [do] know him, and I keep his word.
56 Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day.
He saw it, and was glad!' 57 At this, the Jews said to him, 'You are not yet fifty years old, and you have seen Abraham?' 58 Jesus said to them, 'Amen, amen, I tell you; before Abraham came into existence, I am.
a' 59 Therefore, they took up stones to throw at him, but Jesus was hidden, and , he went out of the temple.



Day 17-May-2023 Wednesday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)

Apostles Andronicus of the Seventy and his fellow-laborer Junia

Andronicus is counted as one of the Seventy. He and his fellow-worker Junia are mentioned by St Paul in his Epistle to the Romans: "Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and fellow prisoners, who are of note among the Apostles, who also were in Christ before me" (Romans 16:7). Some, troubled that a woman is mentioned as an Apostle, have attempted to translate "Junia" as "Junias," a man's name; but the Fathers are united in treating her as "Junia." It may be that they were husband and wife, like Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18), but the ancient witnesses do not tell us.

Andronicus became Bishop of Pannonia, but did not stay in one place, instead travelling throughout the world to proclaim the Gospel. Both Andronicus and Junia were granted the gift of wonder-working. Both of them suffered for Christ and were finally martyred.

Holy Martyr Solochon (298)

He was a Roman soldier, Egyptian by birth, during the reign of the Emperor Maximian. When Solochon refused an imperial command that all soldiers offer sacrifice to the idols, he was was arrested along with two friends and fellow-Christians, Pamphamir and Pamphylon. All three were put to harsh torture, under which Solochon's two friends died. The commander ordered that Solochon's mouth be pried open with a sword, so that he could be force-fed food sacrificed to idols; but the Saint broke the blade with his teeth. After further torture he was left to die. Christians took him to the home of a widow, where he recovered somewhat and counseled the faithful to hold firm in their faith under torture and persecution. Soon afterward, he reposed, giving thanks to God.

Nectarius of Meteora

Day 17-May-2023 Wednesday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)
Readings of the day: Acts 13:13-24; John 6:5-14
13 Now, Paul and his company set sail from Paphos to Perga in Pamphylia where
John left them to return to Jerusalem.
14 Continuing from Perga, they came to Antioch of Pisidia.
There, they went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down [to listen].
15 After the reading of the law and the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent
them a message, 'Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people,
speak!' 6 So Paul stood up, motioned with his hand, and said, 'Men of Israel and
you [Gentiles] who fear God, listen! 17 The God of this people Israel chose our
fathers and made the people prosper when they lived as aliens in the land of
Egypt, and with an uplifted arm, he led them out of it.
18 For a period of about forty years, he put up with them in the wilderness.
19 After destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, God gave them their land
as an inheritance, and this took about four hundred fifty years.
20 After this, he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet.
21 Then they asked for a king, and God gave to them Saul the son of Kish, a man
of the tribe of Benjamin [who ruled] for forty years.
22 After removing him, God raised up David to be their king, even bearing witness
to him, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after my heart, who will do all
my will.
23 From this man's seed, God has brought salvation to Israel, according to his
promise.
24 This was before the coming of Jesus, when John first preached the baptism of
repentance to all the people of Israel.

Gospel Reading:
5 When Jesus looked up and saw that a great crowd was coming to him, he asked
Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread, so that these [people] may eat?' 6 But he said
this to test Philip, for he himself knew what he would do.
7 Philip answered him, 'Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for
them, so that everyone might receive [even] a little!' 8 One of his disciples,
Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 9 There is a boy here who has five
barley loaves [of bread] and two fish, but what are these among so many?' 10
Jesus said, 'Have the people sit down.
Now, there was much grass in that place; and so the men sat down, about five

thousand in number.
11 Then Jesus took the loaves, and having given thanks, he distributed [them] to the disciples, and the disciples to those who were sitting down; and [he did] likewise with the fish, as much as they desired.
12 When they were filled, he said to his disciples, 'Gather up the broken pieces which are left over, so that nothing may be lost!'
13 And so, they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with broken pieces from the five barley loaves, which were left over by those who had eaten.
14 When the people saw the sign which Jesus had accomplished, they said, 'This is truly the prophet who comes into the world!'

Day 18-May-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Martyr Theodotus of Ancyra and seven virgin-martyrs with him (303)

Theodotus was a married inn-keeper in Ancyra during the persecutions of Diocletian. He used his inn-keeping trade as a means of secretly helping the persecuted Christians, many of whom used his inn as a refuge in time of need. One of his holy works was to retrieve the bodies of martyred Christians and give them burial. At that time, seven maidens were tried and tortured for their faith in Christ, then killed by being thrown into a lake. One of them, St Tecusa, appeared to St Theodotus and asked him to retrieve the bodies of her and her sisters in Christ. Under cover of night Theodotus, guided by an Angel, was able to find all seven bodies and bury them honorably. But a friend whom he had asked to help him in this work betrayed him, and he was arrested and subjected to cruel tortures. Finally he was sentenced to be beheaded. As he went to the block, he said to the many Christians who had gathered to weep for him: 'Do not weep for me, brethren, but glorify our Lord Jesus Christ, by whose aid I am finishing my course and overcoming the enemy.' A church dedicated to him was later built on the site of his burial.

Holy Martyrs Peter, Dionysius, Christina, Andrew, Paul, Benedimus, Paulinus, and Heraclius (250)

"These Saints all contested in martyrdom during the reign of Decius (249-251). Peter was from Lampsacus in the Hellespont. For refusing to offer sacrifice to the idol of Aphrodite, his whole body was crushed and broken with chains and pieces of wood on a torture-wheel; having endured this torment courageously, he gave up his soul.

"Paul and Andrew were soldiers from Mesopotamia brought to Athens with their governor; there they were put in charge of two captive Christians, Dionysius and Christina. The soldiers, seeing the beauty of the virgin Christina, attempted to move her to commit sin with them, but she refused and, by her admonitions, brought them to faith in Christ. They and Dionysius were stoned to death, and Christina was beheaded.

"Heraclius, Paulinus,and Benedimus were Athenians, and preachers of the Gospel who turned many of the heathen from their error to the light of Christ.

Brought before the governor, they confesed their Faith, and after many torments were beheaded." (Great Horologion)

The Prologue adds: "One Nicomachus, who was tortured with them, denied Christ under torture, and instantly lost his mind, tearing at his body with his teeth and foaming at the mouth until he breathed his last."

Julian the Martyr

Stephen the New, Patriarch of Constantinople

Day 18-May-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Acts 14:20-27; John 9:39-10:9

20 But as the disciples stood around him, he got up and returned into the city.
On the next day, he and Barnabas left for Derbe.
Return to Antioch 21After preaching the Good News to that city and having made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch.
22 They strengthened the souls of the disciples and exhorted them to continue in the faith, [saying] that 'we must go through many afflictions to enter the Kingdom of God.
23 After appointing presbyters for them in every Church, with prayer and fasting, Paul and Barnabas committed them to the Lord in whom they placed their trust.
24 They passed through Pisidia and arrived in Pamphylia.
25 After preaching the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.
26 From there, they sailed to Antioch from where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work which they had now fulfilled.
27 When they arrived, they gathered the Church and reported all that God had accomplished with them, and that he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

Gospel Reading:

39 Jesus said, 'I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see may see; and so that those who see may become blind.
40 The Pharisees who were present heard these things, and they asked Jesus, 'Are we also blind?' 41 Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, 'We see!' and therefore, your sin remains.
10 The good shepherd 'Amen, amen, I tell you; whoever does not enter by the gate into the sheep fold, but climbs up some other way is a thief and a robber.
2 But the one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep.
3 The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice.
The shepherd calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.
4 Whenever he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.
5 They will by no means follow a stranger but flee from him because they do not recognize the voice of strangers.
6 Jesus spoke this parable to them, but they did not understand what he was telling them.
7 Jesus therefore said to them again, 'Amen, amen, I tell you; I am the gate for the

sheep.
8 All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not
listen to them.
9 I am the gate! Anyone who enters in by me will be saved, and go in and out, and
will find pasture.

Day 19-May-2023 Friday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)

Hieromartyr Patrick, bishop of Prusa, and three priests with him (3rd c?)

'Saint Patrick was Bishop of Prusa, a city in Bythinia (the present-day Brusa or Bursa). Because of his Christian faith, he was brought before Julius (or Julian) the Consul, who in his attempts to persuade Patrick to worship as he himself did, declared that thanks was owed to the gods for providing the hot springs welling up from the earth for the benefit of men. Saint Patrick answered that thanks for this was owed to our Lord Jesus Christ, and explained that when He, Who is God, created the earth, He made it with both fire and water, and the fire under the earth heats the water which wells up, producing hot springs; he then explained that there is another fire, which awaits the ungodly. Because of this, he was cast into the hot springs, but it was the soldiers who cast him in, and not he, who were harmed by the hot water. After this St Patrick was beheaded with the presbyters Acacius, Menander, and Polyaenus. Most likely this was during the reign of Diocletian (284-305).' (Great Horologion)

Memnonus the Wonderworker

Day 19-May-2023 Friday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)
Readings of the day: Acts 15:5-34; John 10:17-28
5 However, some believers from the sect of the Pharisees arose and said, 'It is necessary to circumcise them and to command them to keep the law of Moses!' 6 The apostles and the presbyters gathered together to discuss this matter.
7 When there had been much discussion, Peter stood up and said to them, 'Brethren, you know that some time ago, God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the nations should hear the word of the Good News and believe.
8 God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he had done to us.
9 He made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.
10 And now, why do you put God to the test by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples, one which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? 11 But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus,c just as they are.
12 At this, the whole multitude kept silence.
They listened to Barnabas and Paul report what signs and wonders God had accomplished among the nations through them.
13 When they had finished, James said, 'Brethren, listen to me! 14 Simeon has reported how God first showed concern towards the Gentiles in order to take from them a people for his Name.
15 This agrees with the words of the prophets.
As it is written: 'After these things I will return.
I will again build the tabernacle of David, which has fallen.
I will again build its ruins.
I will set it up, So that the rest of the people may seek after the Lord; All the Gentiles who are called by my Name, Says the Lord, who does all these things.
All his works are known to God from eternity.
19 Therefore, I judge that we should not trouble those who turn to God from among the Gentiles.
20 Instead, we should write to them to abstain from the pollution of idols, from sexual immorality, from what is strangled, and from blood.
21 For from generations of old, Moses has had in every city those who preach him, being read every Sabbath in the synagogues.
22 Then it seemed good to the apostles and the presbyters, along with the whole Church, to choose some of their own men and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas: Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, [who were] leading men among the brethren.

23 Through their hands,c they wrote: 'The apostles, the presbyters, and the
brethren; to the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia:
greetings! 24 We have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you
with words and unsettled your souls by saying: 'You must be circumcised and keep
the law,' although they had no such commission from us.
25 Having assembled with one accord, it has seemed good to us to select men
and to send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26 men who have
risked their lives for the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ.
27 Therefore, we have sent Judas and Silas, who will also tell you the same things
by word of mouth.
28 It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose no greater burden on
you than what is necessary: 29 that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols,
from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality.
If you abstain from these things, it will be well with you.
Farewell!' 30 Accordingly, the men were sent off and arrived in Antioch where they
gathered the community and delivered the letter.
31 The people read it and rejoiced over the encouragement.
32 Judas and Silas (who were also prophets) encouraged the brethren with many
words and strengthened them.
33 After spending some time there, they were sent back with greetings from the
brethren to the apostles.
34 (But it seemed good to Silas to remain there).
Gospel reading:

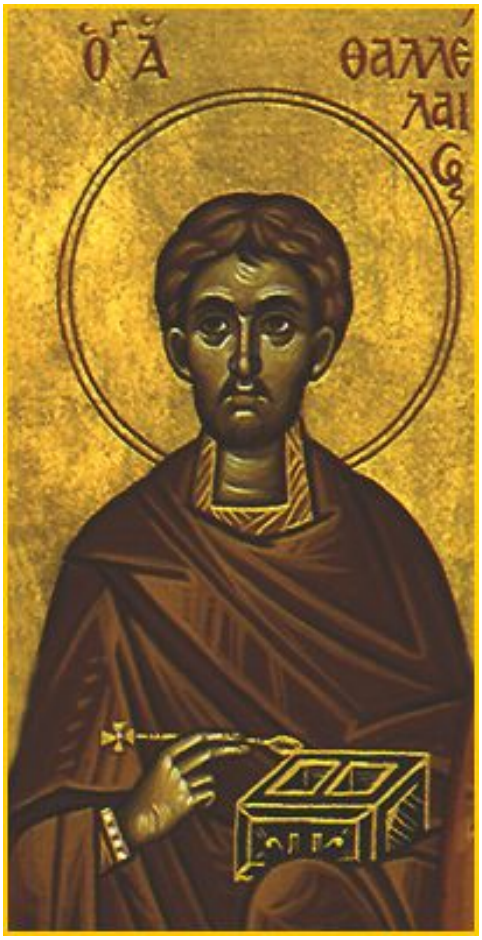
17 Therefore, the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, so that I may take it
again.
18 No one takes my life away from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.
I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.
I received this commandment from my Father.
19 Once again, a division arose among the Jews on account of these words.
20 Many of them said, 'He has a demon and he is insane! Why do you listen to
him?' 21 Others said, 'These are not the sayings of someone possessed by a
demon.
It is not possible for a demon to open the eyes of the blind, is it?' 22 At that time, it
was the Feast of the Dedication in Jerusalem.
23 It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in Solomon's porch.
24 The Jews therefore gathered around him and asked him, 'How long will you
hold us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.
25 Jesus answered them, 'I told you, and you do not believe.
The works that I do in my Father's Name, these bear witness to me.
26 But you do not believe, because you are not of my sheep, as I told you.
27 My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

28 I give eternal life to them; they will never perish, and no one will snatch them
out of my hand.

Day 20-May-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Martyr Thalelaeus at Aegae in Cilicia and those with him (327)



The holy Thalelaeus is counted as one of the Unmercenary Physicians. He was a physician, born in Lebanon to a Berucius (a bishop) and Romylia. During the persecutions by the Emperor Numerian, he fled to Cilicia, but was captured and brought before Theodore, the governor. When Thalelaeus boldly confessed Christ, the cruel governor ordered two soldiers, Alexander and Asterius, to bore holes through his leg-bones, pass a rope through them, and hang him from a tree. But the executioners, by the power of God, were momentarily deprived of their wits and bored through a wooden plank instead, which they hung in the tree. The governor angrily ordered that the soldiers be flogged; during their flogging they cried out: 'The Lord is alive to us; from now on, we are become Christians. We believe in Christ, and suffer for Him.' Hearing these words, the governor ordered that both be beheaded. He then seized their awl and attempted to bore through Thalelaeus' legs himself; but his hand suddenly became paralyzed. The compassionate physician prayed to Christ and healed his persecutor' hand. His heart still hardened, the governor next ordered that the Saint be thrown into water and drowned; but he survived. Next he was thrown to wild beasts, but they licked his feet and rubbed tamely against him. Finally the holy Martyr was beheaded.

Our Father among the Saints Alexis, Metropolitan of Moscow (1378)

He was born in Moscow in 1292. In 1354 he was ordained Metropolitan of Moscow by Philotheus, Patriarch of Constantinople. He founded several monasteries, including the first women's monastery in Moscow. He translated the Holy Gospel from Greek into Slavonic. At that time Russia was under the rule of the Tartars, and St Alexis twice visited the Tartar Khan to plead with him to ease the oppression of the Russian people. On one of these visits he healed Taidula, the Khan's wife. He founded the Chudov Monastery in

Moscow on land given him by the Khan and his wife in thanksgiving for this miraculous healing; the Saint's relics are enshrined at this same monastery. This is the feast of the uncovering of his holy relics in 1431.

Holy Martyr Asclas

Mark the Hermit

Day 20-May-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Acts 15:35-41; John 10:27-38

35 Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord with many others.
36 After some time, Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us revisit our brethren in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, to see how they are doing!' 37 Barnabas planned to take John (who was called Mark) along with them.
38 However, Paul did not think that it was a good idea to take with them someone who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work.
39 Then, the disagreement became so intense that they separated from each other.
Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus.
40 But Paul chose Silas and having been entrusted by the brethren to the grace of God, they departed.
41 Paul went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the Churches.

Gospel Reading:

27 My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me.
28 I give eternal life to them; they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.
29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all.
No one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand.
30 I and the Father are one.
31 Again, the Jews picked up rocks to stone him.
32 Jesus told them, 'I have shown you many good works from my Father.
For which of those do you stone me?' 33 The Jews answered him, 'We do not stone you for a good work, but for blasphemy: because you, being a man, make yourself God.
34 Jesus answered them, 'Is it not written in your law, 'I said, you are gods?' 35 If he called them gods, (those to whom the word of God came, and the Scripture cannot be broken), 36 do you say of him whom the Father has consecrated and sent into the world, 'You blaspheme,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God?' 37 If I do not do the works of my Father, do not believe me.
38 But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may recognize and believe that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.

Day 21-May-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Holy Equals-to-the-Apostles Emperor Constantine (337) and Helen, his mother (327)

Saint Constantine was born in 272, the son of Constantius Chlorus, ruler of the western part of the Roman Empire, and St Helen. When his father died in 306 he was proclaimed successor to the throne. The empire was ruled at that time by several Caesars, each with his own territory. When Constantine learned that the Caesars Maxentius and Maximinus had joined against him, he marched on Italy. It was there that, on the eve of a decisive battle outside Rome, he saw in the sky a radiant Cross with the words "In this sign conquer." He ordered that a battle-standard be made bearing the image of a cross and inscribed with the Name of Jesus Christ. The following day he and his forces attacked and won a spectacular victory. He entered Rome in triumph and in 312 was proclaimed "Emperor of the West" by the Senate. (His brother-in-law Licinius ruled in the East.) Soon thereafter he issued his "Edict of Milan," whereby Christianity was officially tolerated for the first time, and persecution of Christians ceased. (Many believe, mistakenly, that the Edict made Christianity the only legal religion; in fact, it proclaimed freedom of religion throughout the Empire).

Licinius, though he pretended to accept the Edict, soon began persecuting Christians in his domain. In response, Constantine fought and defeated him in 324, becoming sole Emperor of the entire Roman Empire. In 324 he laid the foundations of a new capital in the town of Byzantium; in 330 he inaugurated the new capital city, naming it "New Rome" and "Constantinople." In 325 he called the First Ecumenical Council at Nicea, attending its sessions himself. Shortly before his repose in 337, he received Holy Baptism; he died on Holy Pentecost, at the age of sixty-five, and was interred in the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople.

St Constantine's holy mother Helen, in her role as "Augusta" of the Empire, founded countless churches. She traveled to Jerusalem and found the True Cross on which the Lord was crucified. In the Holy Land she established

churches at the sites of Christ's Nativity and burial, which still stand today in much-modified form. She died at about eighty years of age.

Kontakion

Today, Constantine with his mother Helen present the Cross, the most precious wood. It shames unbelievers. It is a weapon of faithful kings against their adversaries. A great sign has come forth for us which is awesome in battle.

Holy New Martyr Pachomius (1730)

Born in a village of Little Russia (now Belarus), he was kidnapped as a boy and sold to a Turkish tanner as a slave. He spent the next twenty-seven years in Usaki in Asia Minor, where he was forced to embrace Islam. After long years of servitude he escaped and, reclaiming his Christianity, went to the Holy Mountain, became a monk and lived for twelve years. Tormented by his former apostasy, he determined to suffer martyrdom for Christ. With the permission of his elder, Joseph, he returned to Usaki and showed himself to his former owner wearing his monastic habit. He was tortured, thrown into prison, and finally beheaded on on Ascension Day of 1730. His relics are buried on the island of Patmos in the Church of St John the Theologian, where they work many miracles.

Day 21-May-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

The Sunday of the Blind Man
Acts 16:16-34; John 9:1-38

16 As we were going to prayer, it happened that we encountered a certain girl who
had a spirit of divination and who produced much profit to her masters by fortune
telling.
17 As she followed Paul and us, she cried out, 'These men are servants of the
Most High God, who proclaim to us a way of salvation!' 18 And she did this for
many days.
But Paul, becoming greatly annoyed, turned back and said to the spirit, 'In the
Name of Jesus Christ, I order you to come out of her!' And the spirit came out that
very moment.
19 When her masters saw that the hope of their gain was gone, they seized Paul
and Silas, and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities.
20 Having brought them to the magistrates, they said, 'These Jewish men are
causing unrest in our city! 21 They teach customs which it is not lawful for us
Romans to accept or observe!' 22 When the crowd also rose up against them, the
magistrates had them stripped and flogged.
23 After giving them a severe flogging, the magistrates had them thrown into
prison, ordering the jailer to keep them securely.
24 Having received such a command, he threw them in the inner cell and fastened
their feet in the stocks.
25 But when it was about midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing
hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.
26 Suddenly, there was a great earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the
prison were shaken.
At once, all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were loosened.
27 The jailer, awaken from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, began to draw
his sword and he was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had
escaped.
28 But Paul cried with a loud voice, 'Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!' 29
Having asked for lights, the jailer rushed in and fell down trembling before Paul
and Silas.
30 He brought them out and asked, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' 31 They
answered, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your

household!' 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all those who were in his household.
33 Late as it was, the jailer washed their wounds and was immediately baptized, he and his entire household.
34 He took them into his house and set food before them.
He was filled with joy for believing in God, along with his entire household.

Gospel Reading: The Sunday of the Blind Man

As Jesus was passing by, he saw a man blind from birth.
2 His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who has sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' 3 Jesus answered, 'Neither did this man sin, nor his parents; but [it was] in order that the works of God might be revealed in him.
4I must do the works of the one who sent me while it is day.
The night is coming, when no one can work.
5 While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.
6 When he had said this, he spat on the ground, made mud with the saliva and anointed the blind man's eyes with the mud.
7 He then said to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means 'Sent').
And so, the man went away, washed, and came back seeing.
8 At this, the neighbors and those who saw that he had been blind before said, 'Is this not the man who sat and begged?' 9 Others were saying, 'It is he!' Still others were saying, 'He looks like him.
The man said, 'I am he!'a 10 Therefore, the people asked him, 'How were your eyes opened?' 11 He answered, 'A man called Jesus made mud, anointed my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash.
And so, I went away and washed, and I received sight.
12 Then they asked him, 'Where is he?' The man replied, 'I do not know.
13 They brought the man who had been blind to the Pharisees.
14 It was a Sabbath when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes.
15 Again, the Pharisees also asked the man how he had received his sight.

He said to them, 'He put mud on my eyes, I washed, and I see!' 16 At this, some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God because he does not keep the Sabbath.
Others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?' There was division among them.
17 Therefore, they asked the blind man again, 'What do you say about him, since he opened your eyes?' He said, 'He is a prophet!' 18 The Jews did not believe [the report] about this man, that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of this man who had received his sight.
19 They asked the parents, 'Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?' 20 His parents answered, 'We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind.
21But how he now sees, we do not know; or who opened his eyes, we do not know.
He is of age.
Ask him! He will speak for himself.
22 His parents said this because they feared the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone would confess Jesus as Christ, this person would be expelled from the synagogue.
23 Therefore, his parents said, 'He is of age.
Ask him!' 24 And so, they called the man who had been blind a second time, and they told him, 'Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner!' 25 At this, the man answered, 'I do not know if he is a sinner.
One thing I do know: that though I was blind, now I see!' 26 Again, they asked him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' 27 He answered them, 'I told you already, and you did not listen.
Why do you want to hear it again? You do not also want to become his disciples, do you?' 28 Then they insulted him and said, 'You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.
29 We know that God has spoken to Moses; but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.
30 The man answered them, 'How amazing! You do not know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes.
31 We know that God does not listen to sinners; God will listen to anyone who is God-fearing and who does his will.
a 32 Since the world began, it has never been heard of that anyone opened the eyes of someone born blind.
33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.
34 They answered him, 'You were born completely in sins, and do you teach us?' And they threw him out.
35 Jesus heard that they had thrown out the man born blind, he found him and said, 'Do you believe in the Son of God?' 36 The man answered, 'Who is he, Sir,c that I may believe in him?' 37 Jesus said to him, 'You have seen him, and it is he

who is speaking with you.
38 Then the man said, 'Sir, I believe!' and he expressed adoration toe Jesus.

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING
The Gospel of St John would appear to be telling a straight forward story.
It does tell a story but it is a story that is full of deeper meaning sometimes several meanings as the case in this passage that we read today.
'Do you believe in the Son of God?"This is the question that the Lord puts to the man born blind when he finds him after the man has been thrown out of the Synagogue.
However it is a question that is latent in the whole passage and it is addressed as much to us as the readers as it is to the blind man.
First of all the man is born blind – he has not gone blind for some reason like having cataracts or glaucoma, so in reality he does not have any eyes.
The Lord spits on the ground and anoints the man's eye sockets with the clay and spittle mix.
This is what the Lord did when he created Adam from dust and here He is again but this time He is making new eyes.
After washing at the pool of Siloam the man is then able to see with these new eyes.
Siloam, we are told means 'sent".
The man has been sent, but the Lord has also been sent: sent to save us.
The controversy that follows is between the man born blind who can now see and the Jewish authorities who are faced with a dilemma.
If there has been a miracle then the person who has performed the miracle, called Jesus, must be from God.
But if he was from God he would not work miracles on the Sabbath day because he would keep all the Jewish laws.
If he has not kept the law he must be a sinner but as the man born blind points out 'Since the world began, it has never been heard of that anyone opened the eyes of someone born blind.
If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.
'.
' But this man is not 'from" God.
He is God.
And God is not bound by any laws or rules of any kind at all: but He is Love so what he does is loving and creative and he has mercy on His creation – even on the Sabbath! So what are we to make of this passage today? First of all we are called upon to believe and worship the Lord just as the man born blind did.
We know that He is the creator and that He goes on creating as we find in this passage.
His resurrection was the start of a new creation taking place on the First day of the

week.
No longer is the Lord resting from His creation.
He is working in us, those who believe, giving us His Body and Blood so that little by little we can change – be re-created - into the people that He wants us to be.

Day 22-May-2023 Monday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)

Hieromartyr Basiliscus of Comana (308)

He was from Amasea on the Black Sea, and was a nephew of St Theodore the Tyro (February 17). He was a fellow-martyr of Eutropius and Cleonicus (March 3), but is commemorated because, after they were crucified, he was shut in prison. A new governor replaced the one who had killed Basiliscus' companions, and Basiliscus prayed in tears that he not be deprived of a martyr's death. The Lord Jesus appeared to him, promised that his prayer would be answered, and told him to go to his village to say farewell to his mother and brothers. The new governor, Agrippa, sent soldiers to the village and had Basiliscus brought back to him. On the way to Amasea, many wonders were worked throught the Saint, and many were brought to Christ. Brought before the governor, Basiliscus again refused to worship the idols or deny Christ: he was beheaded in Comana and his body thrown into the river. Upon the holy Saint's execution, Agrippa instantly went mad, remaining so until he smeared himself with some of the Martyr's blood, which immediately healed him. Convinced by this wonder of the truth of the Faith, Agrippa was baptised. All of this happened during the reign of Diocletian.

Righteous Melchizedek, king of Salem.

He was a "priest of the most high God" (Genesis 14:18-20), who blessed our Forefather Abraham and "brought forth bread and wine," prefiguring the Holy Eucharist, centuries before the Law was given to Moses or Christ became incarnate. The Epistle to the Hebrews (ch. 7) reveals Melchizedek, the Priest-King, to be a type of Christ.

Commemoration of the Second Ecumenical Council (381).

The council was called by the Emperor Theodosius the Great, primarily to clarify the Church's teaching on the Holy Spirit. Macedonius, bishop of Constantinople, had falsely taught that the Spirit is a creature rather than a Divine Person "Who together with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified." Partly to correct this error, the council revised and expanded the text of the Nicene Creed into the form that we know today.

Holy Martyr John Vladimir, King of Serbia

СТИ
ЈОВАН
ВЛА
ДИМИР

Day 22-May-2023 Monday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)
Readings of the day: Acts 17:1-15; John 11:47-57
17 Paul in Thessalonica After passing through Amphipolis and Apollonia, Paul and Silas arrived in Thessalonica where there was a Jewish synagogue.
2As was his custom, Paul gave them his attention and for three Sabbath days, he reasoned with them from the Scriptures.
3He explained and showed that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, saying, 'This Jesus whom I proclaim to you is the Christ.
4Some of the Jews were convinced and joined Paul and Silas, together with a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few of the leading women.
5 But the unconvinced Jews took along some wicked men from the marketplace, gathered a crowd and set the city in an uproar.
Assaulting the house of Jason, they sought to bring them out to the people.
6 But not finding them, they dragged Jason and some of the brethren before the city officials, shouting, 'These people who have turned the world upside down have also come here, 7 and Jason has received them! All of them act in opposition to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus!' 8 The multitude and the city officials were troubled when they heard these things.
9 After receiving a bond from Jason and the others, they let them go.
10 At once, the brethren sent Paul and Silas away by night to Beroea.
When they arrived, they went into the Jewish synagogue.
11 Now, the Beroeans were more open-minded c than the people of Thessalonica: they received the word with great eagerness of mind and examined the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were true.
12 As a result, many of them believed, as well as some Greek women of high standing, and a fair number of Greek men.
13 But when the Jews of Thessalonica learned that Paul was also proclaiming the word of God at Beroea, they came there to stir up the crowds.
14 Then, the brethren immediately led Paul away to the coast, while Silas and Timothy remained there.
15 But those who escorted Paul took him as far as Athens, and they left instructions for Silas and Timothy that they should join Paul very quickly.
Then, they departed.

Gospel Reading:

47 Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, 'What are we to do? This man does many signs! 48 If we leave him alone like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.
49 But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, 'You understand nothing at all! 50 Do you not consider that it is better for us that one man should die for the people rather than the whole nation should perish?' 51 Now, he did not say this of himself, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, 52 and not for the nation only, but also in order to gather as one the children of God scattered abroad.
53 And so, from that day forward, they planned together to put him to death.
54 For this reason, Jesus no longer walked openly among the Jews.
Instead, he left that place [and went] into the countryside near the wilderness, to a city called Ephraim.
He stayed there with his disciples.
Passover approaches 55 Now, the Passover of the Jews was near.
Many went up from the countryside to Jerusalem before the Passover in order to perform their purification rites.
56 Then, they began to look for Jesus and discussed with one another as they stood in the temple, 'What do you think? Is he not coming to the feast at all?' 57 Now, the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who knew where Jesus was should report it, so that they might arrest him.

Day 23-May-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

St Michael the Confessor, bishop of Synnada (818)

"This Saint was from Synnada in Phrygia of Asia Minor. In Constantinople he met Saint Theophylact (March 8); the holy Patriarch Tarasius, learning that Michael and Theophylact desired to become monks, sent them to a monastery on the Black Sea. Because of their great virtue, St Tarasius afterwards compelled them to accept consecration, Theophylact as Bishop of Nicomedia, and Michael as Bishop of his native Synnada. Because St Michael fearlessly confessed the veneration of the holy icons, he was banished by the Iconoclast Emperor Leo V the Armenian, who reigned from 813 to 820. After being driven from one place to another, in many hardships and bitter pains, St Michael died in exile." (Great Horologion)

Holy Myrrh-bearer Mary, wife of Cleopas

Holy Martyr Michael of St Sabbas' Monastery(9th c.)

When his parents died, the young Michael gave away all his goods and travelled to Jerusalem, where he entered the monastery of St Sabbas the Sanctified. Once he was sent into town to sell some handwork for the monastery. A eunuch of an Arab princess met him in the street and brought him to princess' home to show his wares. (Jerusalem was ruled by Muslim Arabs at that time.) The princess, like Potiphar's wife, conceived an illicit passion for the young monk and invited him to her bed. When he refused, the angry princess had him beaten and taken to the Sultan, where she accused him of blasphemy against Mohammed. The Sultan tried to make him accept Islam, but he refused. When a dose of poison had no effect on the holy Michael, the Sultan had him publicly beheaded in the center of Jerusalem. The monks retrieved his body and gave it honorable burial at his monastery.

Holy Virgin Euphrosyne, Princess of Polotsk (1173)

"She was the daughter of Prince Vseslav of Polotsk. When her parents wished her to be married, she ran away to a monastery and became a nun. An angel of the Lord appeared to her three times to show her the place where she was to build a new monastery for virgins. She brought her own sister, Evdokia, into monasticism and many other young girls from the ranks of the aristocracy. One kinswoman of hers, Zvenislava, a princess of Borisov, brought all her wealth, clothing and precious jewels, and said: 'I count all the beauty of this

world as naught, and wish to give these fine things, prepared for my marriage, to the Church of the Saviour. And I desire to espouse myself to Him in a spiritual marriage, and to bow my head beneath His easy and light yoke.' Euphrosyne professed her too, and gave her the name Evpraxia. In old age, Euphrosyne evinced a desire to die in Jerusalem, and prayed for this boon. God heard her prayer, and she did indeed die in the monastery of St Theodosius in Jerusalem on May 23rd, 1173, during a visit there." (Prologue)

Day 23-May-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Acts 17:19-28; John 12:19-36

19 So they took him [by the arm] and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, 'May we know what this new teaching that you proclaim is all about? 20 You certainly bring some strange things to our ears! Therefore we want to know what all this is about.
21 Now, all the Athenians and the strangers living there spent their time doing nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new thing.
22 So Paul stood in the middle of the Areopagus, and said, 'Athenians! I perceive that you are very religious in all things.
23 In fact, as I passed along and observed your sacred monuments, I also found an altar with this inscription: 'To an unknown God.
What therefore you revere in ignorance, this is what I announce to you! 24 The God who made the world and all things in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in sanctuaries made with hands! 25 Neither is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all life, breath, and everything else.
26 From one, he has made every nation to dwell on the entire surface of the earth (having determined the times and boundaries of their habitation).
27 God did this so that people should seek the Lord and perhaps reach out for him and find him, although he is not far from each one of us.
28 'For in him we live, and move, and have our being!' As some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also his offspring.

Gospel Reading:

19 The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, 'See how this is accomplishing nothing! Behold, the world has gone after him!' 20 Now, among those that went up to express adoration at the feast were some Greeks.
21They came to Philip who was from Bethsaida of Galilee and asked him, 'Sir, we want to see Jesus.
22 Philip came and told Andrew, and in turn, Andrew came with Philip and they told Jesus.
23 But Jesus answered them, 'The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified! 24 Amen, amen, I tell you; unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself a single seed.

But if it dies, it bears much fruit! 25 Whoever loves his life will lose it.
The one who hates his life in this world will keep it to eternal life.
26 Anyone who serves me must follow me! Where I am, there will my servant also be.
The Father will honor anyone who serves me.
27 Now, my soul is troubled.
What shall I say? 'Father, save me from this time?' But I have come to this time for this reason.
28 Father, glorify your Name!' Then, there came a voice out of heaven, saying, 'I have glorified it and will glorify it again.
29 At this, the multitude who stood by heard it, and they said that it had thundered.
Others said, 'An angel has spoken to him.
30 Jesus answered, 'This voice has not come for my sake, but for your sakes.
31 Now, judgment is upon this world! Now, the prince of this world will be cast out!
32 And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all [people] to myself.
33 But he said this to indicate by what kind of death he should die.
34 The multitude answered him, 'We have heard out of the law that the Christ remains forever.
g How do you say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up?' Who is this Son of Man?'
35 Jesus therefore said to them, 'The light is with you a little while longer.
Walk while you have the light, so that darkness may not overtake you.
Whoever walks in the darkness does not know where he is going.
36 While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.

Day 24-May-2023 Wednesday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)

St Symeon Stylites (the Younger) of the Wonderful Mountain (595)

He was born in Antioch in 522. His father, John, died in an earthquake, leaving him to be raised by his mother Martha. From his earliest childhood he lived a very ascetic life and was under special protection and guidance of St John the Baptist, who often appeared to him. He became a monk as a young man and, after a vision of the Lord, who appeared to him as a handsome youth and filled his heart to overflowing with love for Christ, he ascended onto a pillar, where he stayed for eighteen years, praying and singing psalms. He then went to the mountain called 'Wonderful', where he lived alone in a barren place for ten years; he then ascended another pillar, where he remained in extreme hardship for forty-five years. During this time he became known as a wonder-worker and visionary: the Prologue says 'The measure of his love for God was such that rare grace was given him, by the help of which he was able to heal every sort of illness, tame wild beasts and perceive the most distant regions of the earth and the hearts of men. He was taken out of the body and saw the heavens, conversed with angels, harried the demons, prophesied, spent thirty days at a time without sleep and even longer without food, receiving nourishment at the hands of angels.' He reposed at the age of 85; seventy-nine years of his life had been spent in asceticism.

Our Holy Father Nikita Stylites (1186)

As a youth, he was heedless and corrupt; but one day he entered a church and heard the words of Isaiah, 'Wash you, make you clean' (Is. 1:16). His life changed completely: he left his family and property to enter a monastery near Pereyaslavl, where he took on a life of severe asceticism. He wore chains and (in the words of the Prologue) 'shut himself up in a pillar', for which he was called the Stylite. He was granted the gift of healing and by his prayers restored many who came to him, including Michael, Prince of Chernigov, whom he healed of palsy. Some thieves, seeing his chains and thinking that they were made of silver, killed him one night and made off with the chains.

Soon afterward, Saint Nikita appeared to an elder named Simeon and told him to put the chains with him in his grave when they were found.

St Vincent of Lerins (445)

He was born in Toul in Gaul (modern-day France); he was the brother of St Lupus, Bishop of Troyes. He served as a soldier, but eventually became a monk at the monastery of Lerins. There he lived out the remainder of his life, and wrote his Commonitorium, an exposition of the true Orthodox faith; it contains the well-know statement that Christians must hold to the Faith that has been believed "everywhere, always, and by all." He reposed in peace.

Holy Martyr Meletius, along with 1,218 soldiers and their wives and children

Day 24-May-2023 Wednesday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)
Readings of the day: Acts 18:22-28: John 12:36-47
22 After landing at Caesarea, he went to greet the Church, and then traveled down to Antioch.
23 Having spent some time there, he departed and went through the region of Galatia, and Phrygia, in order, strengthening all the disciples.
Apollos
24 Now, a certain Jew named Apollos who was an Alexandrian by race and an eloquent man arrived in Ephesus, and he was powerful with the Scriptures.
25 He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and being ferventa in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately about Jesus, although he had only experienced the baptism of John.
26 Apollos began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.
27 When Apollos had determined to cross over into Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to receive him.
When he arrived there, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace,
28 for he powerfully refuted the Jews, publicly showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

Gospel Reading:
36 While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.
Belief and unbelief After Jesus had said this, he left and hid from them.
37 Still, even though he had performed so many signs in front of them, they did not believe in him.
38 This was to fulfill the word of Isaias (Isaiah) the prophet: Lord, who has believed our report?a To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?
39 For this reason, they could not believe, for Isaias (Isaiah) said elsewhere: 40 He has blinded their eyes and he hardened their heart, lest they should see with their eyes, and perceive with their heart, and would turn, and I would heal them.
41 Isaias (Isaiah) said these things when he saw his glory and spoke of him.
42 However, even many among the rulers believed in him, but because of the Pharisees, they did not confess it [openly], so that they would not be put out of the

synagogue,
43 for they loved human praise more than God's praise.
44 Jesus cried aloud, 'Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in the one who sent me! 45 Whoever sees me sees the one who sent me.
46 I have come as a light into the world, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in the dark.
47 If anyone listens to my sayings and does not believe, I do not judge this person. For I came not to judge the world, but to save the world!

Day 25-May-2023 Thursday

AscensionThursday, Fast Free

Third Finding of the Precious Head of St John the Baptist (~850)

John, the holy and glorious prophet, precursor, and Baptist, is celebrated today with reference to his honorable head that was cut off by means of a girl's voluptuous dance and a sword. There were other revelations of this precious relic, for which its first and second finding is commemorated by the holy Church on the 24th of February. The third discovery was made at Comana of Cappadocia. The relic was entrusted to the bosom of the earth until there passed the destructive days of the iconoclasts in the eighth century. During that terrible time, some Orthodox Christians took away the sacred head of Saint John the Forerunner from Constantinople. They escaped, with the precious relic, to Comana of Cappadocia, where the exiled Saint John Chrysostom had earlier reposed in 407. The precious head of the Forerunner John, after it was reverently housed in a silver vessel, was committed to the ground for safekeeping. It was uncovered by a certain Orthodox priest. It was not found until the reign of Emperor Michael (842-867), son of Theophilos (829-842) and the pious Augusta Theodora (842-856). This was a time when veneration of the icons had been restored by the empress. The relics were miraculously revealed to Patriarch Ignatios (847-858 and 867-877), while he was at his evening prayers. He informed the imperium, which resulted in a delegation dispatched to Comana. Thus were the relics uncovered and returned to the imperial city (ca. 850) by the patriarch.

The hymnographer for today's feast, Tarasios, gives us more details of the discovery and triumphal return. He tells us that we draw grace and sanctification from the Forerunner's head, which is brighter than the sun. The head was made known to a priest of the Lord, named Basil, who till then knew nothing of its whereabouts in Comana. Filled with faith and led by grace, he made a diligent search for the head. When it arose from the bowels of the earth, he made its finding known. The gleaming relic poured forth gifts of healing. Its discovery was like gold extracted from a mine, since it flashed forth rays from the earth. The fragrant relic, a wellspring of cures, was met by Basil the priest and the faithful who had gathered to the site. Thus, from Comana to the queen of cities did the

Forerunner travel. The emperor delighted more in the Forerunner's coming than in his porphyry robe; and so he eagerly welcomed him. The divine priest and foremost of shepherds, the namesake of the God-bearer, Patriarch Ignatios, stretched forth his hands and embraced the head to his breast. He, most solemnly, blessed himself and the faithful. There were reports of ever-flowing gifts that were bestowed by Saint John: bodily pangs and diseases were taken away. Both the Priest Basil and the chief shepherd Ignatios were divinely informed beforehand of the head's discovery. While the head flashed brighter than gold, it was treasured in a silver vessel upon discovery. The hymnographer says that the emperor, the angel's namesake (Michael), rejoiced and received the Forerunner in his palace. The chief shepherd, bearing the name of the sacred God-bearer (Ignatios), piously and excellently ministered in his service toward the precious head. We, too, revere that hallowed head that not only proclaimed the Lamb of God but also washed in the waters of Jordan the head of Jesus.

Source: The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, May. Holy Apostles Convent, 2006.

Apolytikion

Christ God hath revealed to us thy truly ven'rable head as a divine treasure that had been concealed in the earth, O Prophet and Forerunner. Wherefore, as we gather on the feast of its finding, with our hymns inspired of God, we praise Christ the Saviour, Who by thy mighty prayers saveth us from every kind of harm.

Holy Hieromartyr Therapon, Bishop of Cyprus (4th c.)

Little is recorded of his earthly life, except that he was a monk and ascetic on Cyprus who rose to episcopal rank, and that he was martyred during a persecution of Christians. His body rested for centuries in a church in Cyprus. Then in 806, during the reign of the Emperor Nikephoros, the Saint appeared to the church's caretaker, warned him that infidels were about to attack Cyprus, and ordered that his relics be transferred to Constantinople. Without hesitation the caretaker had the casket containing St Therapon's relics put in a ship bound for the Capital. During the journey a great storm arose, but the waters around the ship remained calm, and a sweet scent filled the ship. The caretaker opened the casket and found that it was full to overflowing of a fragrant myrrh which exuded from the holy martyr's relics. In Constantinople, a church was built over the Saint's relics, which became known as a powerful source of healing for those who approached in faith.

Holy Martyrs Pasicrates, Valentian, Julius and those with them (302)

"They were Roman soldiers, and suffered for Christ in about 302 in Macedonian Dorostol. When Pasicrates' brother, Papianus (who had

apostatised from Christ through fear), came to his brother and tried to persuade him to renounce Christ and stay alive, St Pasicrates replied: 'Get away from me; you are no brother of mine!' Pasicrates and Valentian were beheaded together. At his trial, Julius said: 'I am a war veteran, and have served the Emperor faithfully for twenty-six years. And, having been faithful till now in lesser things, how can I not be faithful, in the things that are greater, to the heavenly Kingdom and its King?' Then Nicanor was brought before the prefect, Maximus. Nicanor's wife encouraged her husband to die for the sake of Christ. 'You stupid old woman,' Maximus hurled at her, 'Are you after a better husband?' She replied: 'If you think that of me, give the order to have me killed now, before my husband!' Marcian also perished with Nicanor. His wife came to the place of execution, carrying their son in her arms. Marcian kissed his son and prayed: 'O almighty God, do Thou take care of him!' And they were all then slain and entered into the Kingdom of Christ." (Prologue)

Day 25-May-2023 Thursday

AscensionThursday, Fast Free
Readings of the day: Acts 1:1-12; Luke 24:36-53

1 The first book I wrote, Theophilus, dealt with all that Jesus did and taught from
the beginning, 2until the day in which he was taken up, after giving instructions
through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.
3 After he suffered, he also presented himself alive to them by many proofs,
appearing to them over a period of forty days, and speaking about God's Kingdom.
4 Being assembled together with them, he commanded them, 'Do not leave
Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which you heard from me.
5 Indeed, John baptized in water, but not many days from now, you will be
baptized in the Holy Spirit.
6 Therefore, when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, are you now
restoring the kingdom to Israel?' 7 Jesus told them, 'It is not for you to know the
times or seasons which the Father has set by his own authority.
8 However, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and
you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends
of the earth.
9 After saying these things, as they were watching, Jesus was taken up and a
cloud took him out of their sight.
10 While they were gazing into the sky as he was going, behold, two men in white
clothing stood by them.
11 They said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing into the sky? This Jesus,
who was taken up from you into the sky will come back in the same way as you
saw him going into heaven.
12 Then, they returned to Jerusalem from the mountain called Olive, which is near
Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away.

Gospel reading Luke 24:36-53

36 As they were saying these things, Jesus himself stood among them and said to
them, 'Peace be to you!' 37 But they were startled and frightened, supposing that
they had seen a spirit.
38 He said to them, 'Why are you troubled? Why do doubts arise in your hearts?
39 See my hands and my feet, that it is truly me.
Touch me and see! A spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you see that I have.
40 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.
41 While they still did not believe for joy and were perplexed, he said to them, 'Do

you have anything here to eat?' 42 They gave him a piece of a broiled fish and a honeycomb from a beehive.
43 He took them, and ate in front of them.
44 He said to them, 'This is what I told you, while I was still with you, that everything written in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms, concerning me must be fulfilled.
45 He then opened their minds, so that they might understand the Scriptures.
46 He said to them, 'This is what is written, that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, 47 and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his Name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem.
48 You are witnesses of these things! 49 Behold, I send forth the promise of my Father on you.
But wait in the city of Jerusalem until you are clothed with power from on high.
50 He led them out as far as Bethany, lifted up his hands, and blessed them.
51 It happened, while he was blessing them, that he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven.
52 They expressed adoration to him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; 53 and they were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God.
Amen.
SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING

And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them.
And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy (Lk. 24:50–52).
Thus ended our Lord and Savior’s time of earthly labor! He suffered much, and was greatly glorified. There have never been such sorrows as His sorrows, and there has never been such glory as His glory.
He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:8-11).

Shall we ever behold this glory of our Lord? We shall behold it, for in His last, great prayer, the Lord prayed about this to His Father: I will, He prayed, that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me (Jn. 17:24).
The angels appeared to the Apostles after the Lord's Ascension, witnessing that the Lord will come to all of us on the last day in the same appearance as the Apostles beheld Him ascending into Heaven (cf. Act. 1:2). We shall even participate in the glory of the Ascended Lord, if only we do not make ourselves unworthy, for He ascended into Heaven in order to prepare it to receive all His true followers.
I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also (Jn. 14:2–3).
The Apostle Paul testifies that this merciful accommodation on our behalf has not changed at all even after the Ascension, when he says that on the last Day of the Lord's Coming, the faithful shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:17). This means something will happen to the faithful which is similar even in appearance to what happened to the Lord Himself on the Mount of Olives.

One path, brothers, by which we, too, can attain the heights of holy glory, is the same path by which our Lord ascended in glory; that is, the way of the cross, the way of purification, self-denial, the way of exterior and interior sufferings. Will we remember this? And in remembering it, will we travel Christ's path to Heaven?

If the Mount Tabor of earthly happiness uplifts you, brothers, over everything earthly, and brings you closer to Heaven, then remain upon it! The ascended Lord blesses your heights.
Only take care not to fall into slumber on that Mount Tabor; and when Moses and Elias speak of the cross on which you must crucify your "old man," don't start muttering about building not one, but three tabernacles for that man. Remember, that the way to Heaven is not from Tabor, but from Olivet; and to get to Olivet you have to go through Gethsemane and Golgotha.

The Lord's path should be the path of each and every one of us.
The Lord suffered for all of us equally; the Heavens are opened also to all of us equally. Thus, I ask each and every one of you: can we point to very many things in our lives and say that they were done, or not done, by us because we are predestined for Heaven; because, some day, we should be with our Lord in Heaven? Have we abstained at least once from sin, have we done even one good deed with the thought that the Lord sees us from the Heavens? However small this question may seem, there could scarcely be found amongst us people who answer it in the affirmative.

What is the meaning of our faith in the Ascended Lord? Do we believe in Him, or not? If we believe in Him, then where are our works? If we do not believe in Him, then why do we bear His Name? Whoever truly believes in his heavenly calling cannot be earthly: if he has this conviction it will of necessity be the source which inspires all his thoughts and feelings, his whole life, and all his relationships. In all the circumstances of his life, and in every situation, the true Christian remembers that he is an heir to Heaven, the co-inheritor of Christ, and he acts in accordance with his calling.
In looking at his life, any such person can see that he does not live so much for the present and temporal as for the future and eternal; that his heart is somewhere far away, not in this world, and that his life is hidden in the heights, in God. This is how Christians once seemed to the pagans.

But is there very much of this in us, brothers? Is there at least something unearthly, Heavenly, and Christ-like in us? If there is, then we are like the Apostles, and can return to our own homes from the Mount of Olives with joy.
The blessing of the ascended Lord belongs to us in this case, just as does the promise of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit descends, it will not pass by those who belong to Christ.

Otherwise, the angels' reproach against the Apostles at the Lord's Ascension applies to us with even greater force. I say, with greater force, for to them was said, Why stand ye gazing up into heaven? (Acts 1:11) only because they, out of their love and zeal, gazed for long time at the heavens which received their Lord and Teacher.
Something else needs to be said to us: Sons of men, why stand ye gazing not at heaven, but at the earth? Turn your eyes to Heaven, and behold our Savior, who has long been looking at you.
Enter upon the path to Heaven which long lay before you; cast off the crushing weight of sin that you may travel it lightly, receive the cross into your hands and go to your Savior while He blesses you for this path, before the doors of Heaven close. Meanwhile the Angels, both Heavenly and earthly, invite you to the habitations of the Heavenly Father.

We hear your voice, ye blessed dwellers of Heaven, and want to step upon the path of the Lord; only strengthen us and accompany us with your help. Ever more so—Thou Thyself, O Merciful Savior and Lord, do not abandon us who are orphans in spirit and infirm.
Look down from the Heavens upon our good intentions and upon our infirmity, watch over us and bless us for Thy path; clothe us with power from on high, and make firm our wavering steps, until we come to Thy holy mountain, and unite with Thee. Amen.

Abridged from M. Pogodin, A Wreath upon the Grave of Archbishop Innocent of Taurida (Moscow, 1867)

Day 26-May-2023 Friday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)

Holy Apostle Carpus of the Seventy

He was one of the Seventy and a companion of St Paul, who mentions him in 2 Timothy 4:13. He became a Bishop in Thrace (the Great Horologion says in Berea, the Prologue in Varna), where he suffered martyrdom. St Dionysius the Areopagite met and wrote about him, stating that Carpus never began the Liturgy without first receiving a heavenly vision.

From the Prologue: "We must not desire the death of a sinner, but his repentance. Nothing so saddens the Lord who suffered on the Cross for sinners as when we pray to Him for the death of a sinner and his removal from our path. It once happened that the Apostle Carpus lost patience and began to pray God to send death upon two sinful men, the one pagan and the other an apostate from the Faith. The Lord appeared to him and said: 'Behold, here I am; ready to be crucified again for the salvation of men.' St Carpus related this event to St Dionysius the Areopagite, who wrote it down as a lesson for all in the Church that we must pray for the salvation of sinners and not for their destruction. For the Lord 'is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance' (II Peter 3:9)."

Saint Augustine of Canterbury, evangelizer of England (~605)

He is the founder of the Church in southern England, which at that time was almost entirely pagan, though Christianity thrived in the Celtic lands of Ireland, Wales and parts of Scotland. Augustine, a monk at the monastery of St Andrew in Rome, was chosen by Pope Gregory I to lead a mission to England. He and a party of about forty monks landed in England in 597; they were received warmly by King Aethelbert, who was baptised by Augustine and thus became the first Christian king of the Anglo-Saxon people. In 601 Pope Gregory made Augustine Archbishop of Britain, and he established his cathedral at Canterbury, where he also established a monastery. Saint Augustine worked unsuccessfully to unite his churches with those of the Irish monks and hierarchs, who followed different liturgical practices, kept a different date of Pascha, and disapproved of the less severe Roman monastic practices introduced by the Archbishop. He reposed in peace.

Holy New Martyr Alexander of Thessalonica (1794)

He was born in Thessalonica and, though baptised a Christian, he accepted Islam as a young man, eventually becoming a Sufi (one of a mystical sect among the Muslims). But in time he began to repent, and concluded that martyrdom was the only way for him to cleanse himself from the stain of his denial of Christ. Having repented, he presented himself to the Turks dressed as a Christian. He was thrown into prison and tortured, but in response to every enticement, threat or torment, he would only say 'I was born a Christian, and as a Christian I shall die.' Finally he was sentenced to death, which Alexander joyfully accepted as a sign of God's forgiveness. He was slain by the sword in Smyrna in 1794.

Day 26-May-2023 Friday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)
Readings of the day: Acts 19:1-8; John 14:1-11
19 It happened that, while Apollos was in Corinth, Paul had passed through the upper country and arrived in Ephesus.
There, he found some disciples 2and asked them, 'Did you receive [the]b Holy Spirit when you believed?' They replied, 'No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit!' 3 Paul asked, 'Then, into what were you baptized?' They answered, 'Into John's baptism.
4 Paul said, 'John indeed baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe in the one who would come after him, that is, in Jesus.
5 After hearing this, they were baptized in the Name of the Lord Jesus.
6 When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in other tongues and prophesied.
7 They were about twelve men in all.
8 Then Paul visited the synagogue and spoke boldly for a period of three months, debating and presenting arguments concerning the Kingdom of God.
Gospel reading:

14 ' 'Do not let your heart be troubled.
Have faith in God! Have also faith in me! 2 In my Father's house are many mansions.
If it were not so, I would have told you.
I am going to prepare a place for you.
3If I go and prepare a place for you, I will return and receive you to myself, so that where I am, you may be there also.
4 You know where I am going, and you know the way.
5 Thomas asked him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going! How can we know the way?' 6 Jesus replied to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life.
No one comes to the Father, except through me.
7 If you had known me, you would have known my Father also.
From now on, you know him, and you have seen him.
8 Philip said to him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us!' 9 Jesus answered, 'I have been with you for such a long time, and still, do you not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father! How can you say, 'Show us the Father?' 10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words that I tell you, I do not speak from myself, but the

Father who lives in me accomplishes his works.
11 Believe me that I am in the Father and that the Father is in me; or else believe on account of the works themselves.

Day 27-May-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Holy Hieromartyr Elladios

Elladios (Helladius), the sacred hieromartyr, purified of every pollution, became a vessel of the Holy Spirit. By God's good pleasure, he was anointed high priest and assumed the steering-paddle of the ship of the holy Church of Christ. Regrettably, there is no information extant to let us know either to what century he belonged or to which see he was consecrated. Since the divine office for the day mentions that he refused to sacrifice to the idols, we understand that the tyrant was a pagan. The introductory two lines of Greek verse given before his short biography indicate that he was adorned with the oil of the priesthood and that he shed his blood as a martyr. The icon from the 16th-C. wall painting at Meteora depicts him making the sign of the Cross as the executioners brutally administer a thrashing with clubs.

He was a good shepherd to the flock entrusted to him by Christ. He drove away the noetic wolves, that is to say, the heretics and the ungodly, who relish devouring the rational sheep. As a sensible and prudent steersman, he kept watch over the vessel of the Church. He secured the ship and kept her sailing on a straight course against swells and stormy winds.

When the hallowed bishop was led before the tyrant, he shone forth with more splendor. Neither straits nor circumstances brought about by his arrest and hearing caused him to lose the opportunity to enlighten the minds of the faithful. He valiantly and rapidly went forth to the stadium of martyrdom. With exceedingly candor and freedom of speech, he proclaimed piety and the coessential divinity of the Trinity. The ungodly, according to the divine office to this saint, offered him a gold diadem of precious stones which he roundly refused. The ever-memorable one was condemned to manifold tortures, which resulted in the merciless laceration of his body. Since his souls received pleasure rather than repugnance from the rack, his countenance appeared like a rose. He, thus, in an aged body struggled in the contest as a ruddy-faced youth. He was returned to the prison, where his face shone as the sun; for the Master Christ appeared to him. Jesus gazed upon him and healed his grievous and open wounds. His fetters were rent asunder as thought they were a spider's web. This visitation increased Elladios' eagerness and willingness to undergo further torments.

The resilient disposition of the hierarch infuriated the tyrant. He cast the hierarch into the flames in order to dispose of him, but Elladios stood in the midst of the fire

and remained, by the grace and cooling dew of God, unburned and untouched. Witnessing this miraculous phenomenon brought shame to some of the ungodly, but many of the unbelievers were attracted to the truth of the Faith of Christ. Afterward, Elladios was subjected to harsher chastisements and blows. But again, he feared neither fire nor sword. Today's hymns tell us that he was dragged upon the ground and endured the excruciating piercing of his heels, spilling much blood. He finally surrendered his soul into the hands of God and, thus, received the crown of martyrdom.

Source: The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, May. Holy Apostles Convent, 2006.

Apolytikion

As a sharer of the ways and a successor to the throne of the Apostles, O inspired of God, thou foundest discipline to be a means of ascent to divine vision. Wherefore, having rightly divided the word of truth, thou didst also contest for the Faith even unto blood, O Hieromartyr Helladius. Intercede with Christ our God that our souls be saved.

Hieromartyr Therapon, bishop of Sardis (259)

For boldly preaching Christ and bringing many to the Faith, he was seized and tortured by the pagans. After imprisoning and starving him, his persecutors bound him to four posts and flogged him until the flesh was stripped from his bones. But he remained alive, and the four dead posts to which he was tied sprouted into tall, green trees, from which many received healing. At last St Therapon was slain by the sword, during the reign of the Emperor Valerian.

Holy Martyrs Theodora and Didymus (304)

"In the reign of the wicked Emperor Maximilian, there lived in Alexandria a maiden, Theodora, well-educated and of noble lineage. She was brought to trial before the pagans for her Christian faith. After long interrogation and torture for the Faith, the prince, her tormentor, ordered that she be thrown into a brothel and the soldiers given free access to her to indulge their carnal lusts. Theodora prayed fervently to God to save her from defilement, and, when she had prayed, a soldier called Didymus came in to her and told her that he was a servant of Christ. He dressed her in his soldier's garb and himself in her dress, then let her out and remained in the brothel himself. He was seized and brought before the judge, where he acknowledged that he was a Christian and had saved Theodora, and was now prepared to die for Christ. He was condemned to death and taken out to the place of execution. Theodora ran up to him there and cried out: 'Although you saved my honour, I did not ask you to save me from death. Yield the martyr's death to me!' Didymus replied: 'My beloved sister, do not hinder my death for Christ, nor the washing of my sins in

my blood.' Hearing this exchange, the pagans condemned them both to death, and they were beheaded and their bodies burned. They suffered with honour and received eternal wreaths of glory in Alexandria in the year 304." (Prologue)

Holy New Confessor John the Russian (1730)

He was captured during a Russian campaign against the Turks in 1711, and sold into slavery in Asia Minor. As a slave he strove to serve God faithfully, while serving his earthly master in everything honorable. Despite many enticements offered by the Muslims to renounce his faith, he remained steadfast, and was permitted to work miracles through his prayers. He reposed in peace in 1730. His relics remained incorrupt.

Saint David of Garesjei (6th c.)

"This David is one of the thirteen Georgian Fathers (May 7). He is thus named for the Garajeli desert near Tiflis, where he lived the ascetic life. In old age, David decided to visit the Holy Land with several of his disciples. He left the direction of the monastery to two elders, Lucian and Dodo, and set out on the way. When they came to a hill from which Jerusalem was visible, David burst into tears and said: 'How can I dare to walk in the steps of God incarnate with these sinful feet?', and he told his disciples to go and worship at the holy places, but he himself took up three stones and set off to return. But the Lord did not let such humility remain hidden from the world, and an angel appeared to Elias, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, and said to him: 'Send at once for the elder who is even now returning to Syria; he has taken with him three stones, and is carrying with him all the Holy Land's grace. One stone is a sufficient blessing for him; let him return the other two to Jerusalem. He is called Abba David of Garesjei.' The Patriarch quickly sent men off to overtake the elder. They took two stones from him, and let him go on his way. The third stone lies on his grave to this day, and possesses miraculous healing power." (Prologue)

Venerable Bede (Baeda) (735)

He spent almost his entire life as a monk in England, and is known primarily for his many writings. He entered the monastery at Wearmouth at the age of seven, and later moved (perhaps as one of the founders) to the monastery of Jarrow, where he spent the remainder of his life. He was ordained to the priesthood in his thirtieth year. In addition to many works of biblical exegesis, very popular in the middle ages, he compiled the Ecclesiastical History, still the primary source for the history of Christianity's establishment in the British isles. He reposed in peace.

A problem: Bede lived during the time of the undivided Church, but was only canonized, in the west, in 1899, centuries after the Great Schism. Presumably, then, he has never been formally glorified by the Orthodox Church. Is he a Saint of the Church? We leave the answer to wiser heads.

Day 27-May-2023 Saturday

Fast Free
Readings of the day: Acts 20:7-12; John 14:10-21
7 On the first day of the week, when the disciples were gathered together to break bread,a Paul talked with them.
Since he intended to depart on the next day, he continued his speech until midnight.
8 (There were many lights in the upper room where we had assembled).
9 A certain young man named Eutychus was sitting in the window, becoming drowsy.
As Paul spoke still longer, the young man was overcome by sleep and fell down from the third floor.
He was taken up dead.
10 But Paul went down, fell down on him and took him in his arms, saying, 'Do not be distressed! His soul is [still] in him!' 11 Paul went back upstairs, broke bread, ate, and talked with them a long while, even until daybreak.
Then, he departed.
12 The people brought the boy [home] alive, greatly comforted.

Gospel Reading:

10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words that I tell you, I do not speak from myself, but the Father who lives in me accomplishes his works.
11 Believe me that I am in the Father and that the Father is in me; or else believe on account of the works themselves.
12 Amen, amen, I tell you; whoever believes in me will also accomplish the works that I accomplish and will do [even] greater works than these, because I am going to my Father.
13 Whatever you will ask in my Name is what I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.
14 If you will ask anything in my Name, I will accomplish it.
15 If you love me, keep my commandments! 16 I will pray to the Father and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever,17 the Spirit of truth.
The world cannot receive him because it does not see him and does not know him.
You know him, because he lives with you and will be in you.
18 I will not leave you orphans! I will come to you! 19 In a short time, the world will

no longer see me, but you will see me.
Because I live, you also will live! 20 In that day, you will know that I am in my
Father, and you in me, and I in you.
21 Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, that person is someone
who loves me.
Whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love and reveal myself to
such a person.

Day 28-May-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

St Nicetas the Confessor, bishop of Chalcedon (9th c.)

He entered monastic life in early youth, and in time rose to the rank of Bishop in Chalcedon. As a hierarch, he showed outstanding compassion for the poor, caring for many orphans, widows and beggars. When the Emperor Leo the Armenian attacked the holy icons, Nicetas stood against him, and was driven into exile, where he reposed after much hardship and suffering.

Martyr Eftychios of Melitene
Holy Martyr Heliconis
Saint Andrew, Fool-for-Christ
Saint Ignatios, Bishop of Rostov

Day 28-May-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Sunday of the Fathers of the 1st Ecumenical Council
Acts 20:16-18, 28-36; John 17:1-13
6 Paul had determined to sail past Ephesus in order not to spend time in Asia because he was in a hurry: if possible he wanted to be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost.
17 From Miletus, Paul sent a message to Ephesus and called to himself the presbyters of the Church.
18 When they arrived, he told them, 'You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you all the time.
28 Therefore, keep watch over yourselves and over the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers! Be shepherds of the Church of God which he has purchased with the blood of his own [Son].
c 29 For I know that after my departure, vicious wolves will enter in among you and they will not spare the flock.
30 From among your own group, men will arise who will speak perverse things in order to draw away the disciples after them.
31 Therefore, keep watch! Remember that for a period of three years, I did not cease night and day to warn everyone with tears.
32 Now, brethren, I entrust you to God, and to the word of his grace which is able to build up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.
33 I coveted no one's silver, or gold, or clothing.
34 You yourselves know that these, [my] hands, served my needs and those who were with me.
35 In all things, I have given you an example, that by this kind of hard work you should support the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, as he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive!" 36 After saying these things, Paul knelt down and prayed with them all.

Gospel Reading: Sunday of the Fathers of the 1st Ecumenical Council

17 The 'high-priestly' prayer Jesus said these things, and lifting up his eyes to heaven, he said, 'Father, the time has come! Glorify your Son, so that your Son may also glorify you.
2 Even as you gave him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.

3 This is eternal life: that they should know you,
the only true God, and him whom you have sent,
Jesus Christ.
4 I have glorified you on the earth! I have
accomplished the work which you have given me
to do! 5 Now, Father, glorify me with yourself with
the glory I had with you before the world existed.
6 I have revealed your Name to the people
whom you have given me out of the world.
They were yours, and you have given them to
me; they have kept your word.
7 Now, they have known that all things you have
given me are from you.
8 The words you have given me, I have given to
them.
They have received them and they have known
for certain that I came forth from you, and they
have believed that you sent me.
9 I pray for them; I do not pray for the world, but for those whom you have given
me, for they are yours.
10 All things that are mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in
them.
11 I am no longer in the world, but these are [still] in the world, and I am coming to
you.
Holy Father, keep them through your Name which you have given me, so that they
may be one, even as we are [one].
12 While I was with them in the world, I protected them in your Name.
Those whom you have given me I have kept.
None of them is lost, except the son of destruction, so that the Scripture might be
fulfilled.
13 But now I come to you, and I say these things in the world, so that they may
have my joy made full in themselves.

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING

«When he had spoken thus, he knelt down and prayed with them all» (Acts 20:36)
Saint Paul spoke to the leaders of the church in Ephesus about the problems that would arise from false teaching coming both from outside the church and from within to lead people away from the truth revealed in Christ.
When he had finished he prayed with those leaders.
Praying together was as important as speaking to them.
Prayer, opening ourselves to God, should provide the context and framework for all that we do.

The First Ecumenical Council, which we commemorate today, had a model in the meeting of Saint Paul and Saint Barnabas with the Apostles and leaders of the Church in Jerusalem, recorded in Acts 15.
This meeting was to resolve a dispute about practical matters, but was rooted in prayer.
The conclusion uses the phrase: «it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us».
From this we see that the meeting was conducted in prayer in order to find the will of God, rather than being conducted simply to find a majority or a consensus on a purely human basis.
Commenting on Acts 20:36, Saint John Chrysostom describes Saint Paul's prayer in this context as being «with much feeling» (Homily 45 on the Acts of the Apostles). Our prayer should show the same feeling.
We should pray with others and for others, rather than for ourselves.
Through our prayer we show our love for one another and enable them to know God's love for them.
Praying for our leaders and with our leaders is an essential part of this to enable them to lead us in the way of God.
Our prayer should leave room for us to listen to God, rather than just talking at him.
We need to find God's will for us, to enable us to follow in the way of truth and to hear «the word of his grace» so that we may receive «the inheritance among all those who are sanctified» (Acts 20:32). The philosopher Kierkegaard reminds us that «the function of prayer is not to influence God, but rather to change the nature of the one who prays», (Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing, 1847). We pray that we may conform ourselves to God and be open to his guidance.
Saint Paul tells us to «pray without ceasing» (I Thes. 5:17). How we follow that instruction will vary, but we should all be moving along the path of making our whole life based in prayer.
An anonymous author, writing of Saint Gregory Palamas, states: «Let no one think, my brother Christians, that it is the duty only of priests and monks to pray without ceasing, and not of laymen.
No, no; it is the duty of all of us Christians to remain always in prayer.
» Making prayer the basis of our lives requires work and practice.
If we persevere in it then we have a living experience of the presence of God with us and be able to resist those who seek to separate us from the truth.
«I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them» (Acts 20:29-30). Praying daily and continually with and for our leaders, as Saint Paul prayed with the leaders of the church in Ephesus, will help us to grow in faith, and enable us to receive the true teaching about God as proclaimed in Scripture and clarified in the works of the Fathers of the Church and in the decisions of the First and later Ecumenical Council.

Archim.
Kyril Jenner

Day 29-May-2023 Monday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)

Virgin-martyr Theodosia of Tyre (308)

During the persecutions of the Emperor Maximian, the virgin Theodosia came to comfort a group of Christians who were standing before the governor of Caesarea in Palestine. When she encouraged them not to shun martyrdom, she too was brought before the judge, who ordered that a stone be tied around her neck and that she be thrown into the sea; but angels carried her to shore unharmed. The judge then ordered that she be beheaded. The night that the sentence was carried out, Theodosia appeared to her parents, surrounded by heavenly light and accompanied by other virgin martyrs, and said, 'Do you see how great is the glory and grace of my Christ, of which you wished to deprive me?' (Her parents, wishing to preserve her from martyrdom, had tried to prevent her from confessing Christ).

Commemoration of the First Ecumenical Council (325)

The council was called by the Emperor Constantine the Great and held in Nicea in 325. The teaching of the Alexandrian priest Arius — that Christ is not co-eternal with the Father, but is His divine creation — was attracting many followers throughout the empire, and the Emperor wished for a statement of correct doctrine from the Church. Present at the council were 318 holy hierarchs, including St Nicholas of Myra, St Athanasius the great, and St Spyridon. The council clearly condemned the Arian heresy, formulated the first version of the Symbol of Faith (often called the Nicene Creed), and propounded twenty canons. The Fathers of the Council are commemorated on the Sunday after Ascension.

The Fall of Constantinople (1453); "Blessed Constantine XII, last of the Byzantine emperors, martyred by the Turks (1453)"

On this date in 1453, Constantinople, the capital city of the Christian world, was sacked by the forces of Sultan Mehmet (Mohammed) II, bringing it under Turkish rule, where it remains to this day.

Constantine XII, the last Byzantine Emperor, died defending the city. Sources are sharply divided as to whether he is to be counted as a Christian Martyr. The designation "Blessed Constantine", above, is from the St Herman Calendar, whose compilers cite Russian martyrologies which list him as a saint. However, the Prologue cites the fall of Constantinople while pointedly omitting any praise of Constantine. He accepted (and never publicly renounced) the false "union" of Florence, and so is counted by some as a heretic. Many Orthodox Christians, including many of the people of

Constantinople, saw the city's fall as divine retribution for the Empire's acceptance of the union.

Before his death the Emperor donned soldier's armor and helped to man the ramparts of the City; his body was never found. Though various legends abound, the most likely explanation is that he died with many other defenders and was cast with them into a common grave.

Virgin Martyr Theodosia of Constantinople
Saint Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria
Saint John of Ustiug, Fool-for-Christ and Miracle-worker

Day 29-May-2023 Monday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)
Readings of the day: Acts 21:8-14; John 14:27-15:7
8 The following day, we, Paul's companions, left and arrived in Caesarea.
We went to the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him.
9 Now, this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied.
10 As we stayed there for a few days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.
11 Coming to us and taking Paul's belt, he bound his own feet and hands, and said, 'Thus says the Holy Spirit: 'Likewise, in Jerusalem, the Jews will bind the man who owns this belt and they will deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.
' 12 When we heard these things, both we and the disciples who lived there begged Paul not to go up to Jerusalem.
13 Then Paul answered, 'What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? Indeed, I am ready, not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the Name of the Lord Jesus.
14 Since he would not be persuaded, we became silent, except to say, 'The Lord's will be done!'

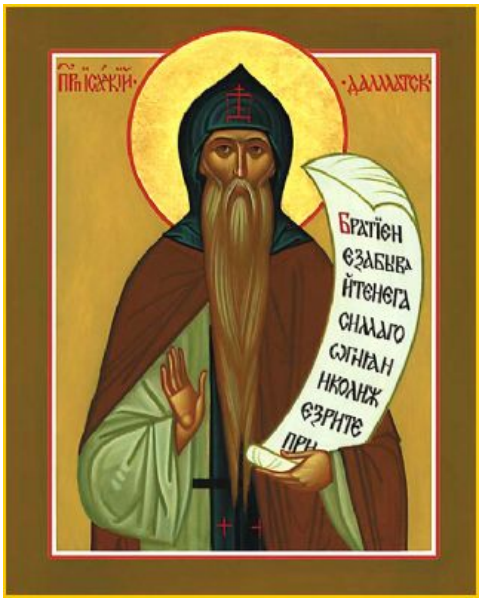
Gospel Reading:
27 Peace I leave with you! My peace I give to you! I do not give to you as the world gives.
Do not let your heart be troubled and do not let it be afraid.
28 You heard me tell you, 'I am going away, and I [shall] return to you.
If you loved me, you would have rejoiced because I said 'I am going to my Father;' for the Father is greater than I.
d 29 Now, I have told you before it happens so that, when it happens, you may believe.
30 I will not speak with you much longer because the prince of the world is coming, and he has nothing in me.
31 But so that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father has commanded me.
Arise, let us be on our way!' 15 The vine and the branches 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.
2 Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, he prunes,a so that it may bear more fruit.

3You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.
4 Remainb in me, and I in you.
As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it remains in the vine, neither can you, unless you remain in me.
5 I am the vine, you [are] the branches! Whoever remains in me and I in him bears much fruit, for apart from me, you can do nothing.
6 Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown out as a branch and is withered. Such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned! 7 If you remain in me and if my words remain in you, you may ask whatever you desire and it will be done for you.

Day 30-May-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

St Isaac, founder of the Dalmatian Monastery at Constantinople (383)



While a hermit in the east, Isaac heard that the Arians, supported by the Emperor Valens, were persecuting Orthodoxy. Leaving his seclusion, he traveled to Constantinople, where he lived in a small hut. He confronted the Emperor, telling him that if he did not cease his persecutions and embrace the true Faith, disaster would befall him. The Emperor ignored his words, and shortly thereafter was killed in a battle with the Goths. The Emperor Theodosius the Great then came to the throne, restoring peace to the Church. Hearing of Isaac and his prophecy, the Emperor sent for Isaac and prostrated before him. Isaac wished to return to the desert, but was persuaded to remain as a monk in Constantinople. He took part in the Second Ecumenical Council, where he shone in zeal for the Faith; the Third Ecumenical Council made him archimandrite over all the monasteries in the City. (Some say that the monastery founded by him is called the Dalmatian Monastery because it was built by Dalmatus, a wealthy nobleman of the City; others say that it was founded by St Isaac himself and later took its name from Abbot Dalmatus, who succeeded Isaac). In his own lifetime St Isaac was known far and wide as a wonderworker and one endowed with the gift of prophecy.

Saint Isaac is also commemorated in August 3, along with Dalmatus and his son Faustus.

St Macrina, grandmother of St Basil the Great (4th c.)

"The grandmother of St Basil the Great, she was outstanding for her intellect and piety. She was a disciple of St Gregory the Wonder-worker of Neocaesarea. In the reign of Diocletian, she abandoned her home and hid in the forests and desert places with her husband, Basil. Although their home was confiscated, they felt no pangs of regret. Stripped of everything except their love for God, they settled in an ancient forest and spent seven years there. By God's providence, goats would come down from the mountains and provide them with food. They both died peacefully in the fourth century, after great sufferings for the Christian faith." (Prologue)

Holy Martyr John, King of the Persians

Day 30-May-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Acts 21:26-32; John 16:2-13

26 So Paul took the men, and the next day, he purified himself and went with them into the temple, declaring the fulfillment of the days of purification, until the offering was offered for every one of them.

27 When the seven days were almost completed, Jews from Asia saw Paul in the temple.

They stirred up the entire crowd and laid hands on him, 28 shouting, 'Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the {chosen} people, the law, and this place.

Moreover, he also brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place!' 29 [They said this] because they had seen Trophimus, the Ephesian, with Paul in the city, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple.

Paul is arrested 30 The entire city was in turmoil and the people came running.

They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and at once the doors were shut.

31 As they were trying to kill him, news came up to the commanding officer of the [Roman] troops that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.

32 Immediately, he took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to the crowd.

When they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, the Jews stopped beating Paul.

Gospel Reading:

2 They will expel you from the synagogues! Yes, the time is coming when whoever kills you will think that he is offering {divine} service to God!

3 They will do these things because they have not known the Father or me.

4But I have told you these things, so that when the time arrives, you may remember that I told you about them.

I did not tell you these things from the beginning because I was with you.

5 But now, I am going to him who sent me, and none of you is asking me, 'Where are you going?' 6 But because I have told you these things, sorrow has filled your heart.

7 Yet, I tell you the truth; it is to your advantage that I go away because if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you.

But if I go, I will send him to you.

8 When he has come, he will convict the world about sin, about righteousness, and about judgment; 9 about sin, because they do not believe in me; 10 about

righteousness, because I am going to my Father and you will not see me any more; 11 about judgment, because the prince of this world has been judged.
12 I still have many things to tell you, but you cannot bear them now.
13 However, when he, the Spirit of truth, has come, he will guide you into all truth because he will not speak from himself, but whatever he hears, he will speak. He will tell you of things that are yet to come.

Day 31-May-2023 Wednesday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)

Apostle Hermas of the Seventy

He is mentioned in the Epistles of St Paul (Romans 16:14). He served as a bishop in the first-century Church, and died a martyr. His book, The Shepherd, is one of the earliest Christian writings outside of the New Testament, and was held in such esteem by the early Church that it is sometimes found in ancient collections of the Holy Scriptures.

Hermas had been a wealthy man, but had fallen into poverty through his sins. A man, clad all in white and holding a staff, appeared to St Hermas and, telling him that he was an angel of repentance, gave St Hermas twelve commandments:

- To believe in God
- To live in simplicity and innocence
- To love truth and flee from falsehood
- To guard his thoughts in chastity
- To learn patience and magnanimity of soul
- To know that a good and an evil spirit attend every man
- To fear God, but not the devil
- To perform every good deed and to restrain himself from every evil one
- To pray to God in faith from the depths of his heart, so that his prayer might be heard
- To preserve himself from melancholy, the daughter of doubt, and from anger
- To try true and false prophecies
- To preserve himself from every evil desire.

Eusebius and Haralambos the Monk-martyrs
Holy Martyr Hermias the Soldier of Comana in Cappadocia

Hermias, the holy martyr, made his mark during the years of Antoninus Pius (138-161) and Marcus Aurelius (161-180). Hermias had served as a soldier for many years, until he was elderly and white-haired. He was comely not only in the flesh but also in the spirit as he put away worldly things. While in the city of Comana of Cappadocia, he was arrested upon professing Jesus and upholding his belief in the Christian Faith. Hermias was brought before Governor Sebastian. Since the old soldier laid aside earthly soldiery, he refused to offer sacrifice to the idols. With

his denial of the pagan gods of perdition, the application of harsh tortures was the penalty for the soldier of Christ.

The first punishment involved the breaking of his jaw upon a face that was generally deemed fair. Close upon this brutal act, they flayed his facial flesh. This was followed by the uprooting of his teeth. Afterward, they lit a furnace into which the saint was cast. He was bedewed with the grace of the Spirit so that, after three days, the gallant martyr was still standing in the flames until he exited unharmed. Next, they contrived to put him to death by having him drink a deadly potion. The concoction was mixed by a magician, named Marus. The saint partook of the poisonous draft and suffered no ill effects. A second drink, more toxic, was prepared. This also failed to kill Hermias. In the sequel, he not only survived the noxious goblet but also drew to the Faith of the Christ the very magician who formulated the lethal mixture. The magician also publicly confessed Jesus Christ, for which declaration he was swiftly beheaded. In this manner, he received the crown of martyrdom.

As for Hermias, he was to suffer subsequent torments. He endured all the vehement pain and rending of his body as though someone else were suffering. With the use of rakes and combs, they severed and shivered his sinews and muscles. After a while, a cauldron of boiling oil was prepared. The martyr was thrown into that bubbling unction, but he emerged unscathed. From that moment, they began the operation of plucking out his eyes. During the gouging, he spoke calmly to Sebastian and said, 'Thou mayest take the eyes of the flesh that used to look upon this world’s vanity. But the eyes of my heart remain, clearly fixed upon the true light.'

As if this excruciating torture were not enough, there ensued another punishment: he was suspended upside down for three days. In this position, too, the martyr triumphed as he fixed his mind’s eye heavenward upon God. When men were sent to confirm whether Hermias had survived his wounds and hemorrhaging, they were blinded from terror at seeing him alive. The blind appealed to the martyr for help. He invited them to approach and then healed them in the name of our Savior. Since he continued to refuse worship to the pagan deities, the idolaters could no longer bear his heroic exploits and wonders. The governor, losing command of himself, with his own sword, dispatched Hermias to the next life. The honorable head of Christ’s warrior, Hermias, was severed but crowned in the heavens.

Christians secured his relics and gave him an honorable burial. His relics were known to work wonders.

Source: The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, May. Holy Apostles Convent, 2006.

Day 31-May-2023 Wednesday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)
Readings of the day: Acts 23:1-11; John 16:15-23

23 Paul before the Sanhedrin Looking straight at the Sanhedrin, Paul said,
'Brothers, I have lived before God in all good conscience until this day.
2 Then Ananias, the high priest, ordered those who stood by him to strike Paul on
the mouth.
3 At this, Paul said to him, 'God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! Do you sit to
judge me according to the law, and [yet] command me to be struck contrary to the
law?'
4 Those who stood by said, 'Do you insult God's high priest?' 5Paul said, 'I did not
know, brothers, that he was high priest.
For it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.
6 But when Paul realized that some were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, he
cried out in the council, 'Men and brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees!
And I am being judged concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead!'
7 When he said this, an argument arose between the Pharisees and Sadducees,
and the assembly was divided.
8 (For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, angel, or spirit; but the
Pharisees believe in all of these things).
9 A great uproar began, and some of the teachers of the law who belonged to the
party of the Pharisees stood up.
They strongly argued, 'We find no evil in this man! But if a spirit or angel has
spoken to him, let us not fight against God!'
10 The dispute became so fierce that the commanding officer feared that they
would tear Paul to pieces.
He then ordered the soldiers to go down and remove Paul from the assembly by
force, and to bring him into the barracks.
11 The following night, the Lord stood by him, and said, 'Rejoice, Paul! As you
have borne witness to me at Jerusalem, you must also bear witness in Rome.

Gospel Reading:
15 Everything the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take of [what is]
mine and will declare it to you.
16 In a little while, you will no longer see me, and then after a little while you will
see me because I go to the Father.

17 At this, some of his disciples said to one another, 'What is this that he is saying to us, 'In a little while, you will no longer see me, and then after a little while you will see me' and, 'because I go to the Father?'
18 And so they kept asking, 'What is this that he says, 'A little while?' We do not understand what he is saying!'
19 Now, Jesus perceived that they wanted to ask him [about these things], and he said to them, 'Are you discussing among yourselves concerning this, that I said, 'In a little while, you will no longer see me, and then after a little while you will see me?'
20 Amen, amen, I tell you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy!
21 When a woman gives birth, she has sorrow because her time has come.
But when she has delivered the child, she does not remember the anguish any more because of the joy that a human being is born into the world.
22 Therefore, you now have sorrow, but I will see you again; and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you! 23 In that day you will ask me no [more] questions.
Amen, amen, I tell you; whatever you may ask of the Father in my Name, he will give it to you.

Day 01-Jun-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Martyr Justin the Philosopher and those with him at Rome (166)

Born in 103, he was a philosopher from the Samaritan town of Shechem in Palestine, who had devoted his life to the search for truth, trying many philosophical schools and sources of human wisdom: the Stoics, the Peripatetics, the Pythagoreans and finally the Platonists. One day an old man (whose name and origin are unknown) appeared to him and spoke to him of the Prophets and Apostles who had learned of God not by their own wisdom, but by revelation of God Himself. He read the scriptures and was convinced of the truth of the Faith, but he would not be baptised or call himself a Christian until he had tested all the pagans' arguments against Christianity. To this end he traveled to Rome, where he engaged in debate at philosophical gatherings, impressing all with his wisdom. In Rome he also witnessed the martyrdom of Sts Ptolemy and Lucian; this moved him to write an Apologia for the Christian faith and the Christian people, which he gave to the Emperor Antoninus and the Senate. They were so moved by this document that the Emperor ordered that persecution of Christians should cease.

For the remainder of his life, Justin devoted all his skills to the proclamation of the Gospel and the defense of Christians. To the end of his life, wherever he preached Christ, he always wore his philosopher's garb. In addition to his Apologia, he wrote a number of other learned defenses of the faith.

Eventually he was imprisoned following the false accusations of Crescens, a jealous Cynic philosopher. He died (one source says by beheading, another by poison) in Rome in 167 under the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, successor to Antoninus.

Our Holy Father Agapitus of the Kiev Caves (1095)

"A natural doctor, he was a disciple of St Antony of Kiev. He healed people by prayer and the prescribing of cabbage, which they made into a sort of bread. Prince Vladimir Monomachus was healed in this way, and this made Agapitus famed on all sides. The Prince's doctor, an Armenian, hearing of this, began to spread slander about him. When Agapitus became ill, the Armenian came and, looking at him, said that he would die in three days and that, if he did not do so, then he, the Armenian, would become a monk. Agapitus told him that it had been revealed to him by God that he would die, not in three days but in three months. And so it came to pass. After Agapitus's death, the Armenian went to the abbot of the Monastery of the Caves and asked him to make him a monk. He explained that Agapitus had appeared to him from the other world

and reminded him of his promise. And so the one-time envier became a humble monk, by the providence of God whose care it is that all men be saved. St Agapitus entered into rest in about 1095." (Prologue)

Righteous Pyrrus

Day 01-Jun-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Acts 25:13-19; John 16:23-33

13 A few days later, King Agrippa and Bernice arrived in Caesarea and greeted Festus.
14 Since Agrippa was spending some time there, Festus presented Paul's case before the king, saying, 'There is a certain man who was left as a prisoner by Felix.
15 When I was in Jerusalem, the chief priests and the presbyters of the Jews presented an [accusatory] report about this man, asking me to condemn him.
16 I answered them that it is not the custom of the Romans to condemn anyone to death before the accused has met his accusers face to face and has had opportunity to make his defense in the case against him.
17 Then, since they had come together here, I did not delay.
On the following day, I sat on the judgment seat and commanded the man to be brought in.
18 When the accusers stood up, they did not bring any of the charges I was expecting.
19 Instead, they had some dispute against him dealing with their own religion, and about a certain Jesus who was dead, and who Paul affirms to be alive.

Gospel Reading:

23 In that day you will ask me no [more] questions.
Amen, amen, I tell you; whatever you may ask of the Father in my Name, he will give it to you.
24 Until now, you have asked nothing in my Name.
Ask, and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete!
25 I have told you these things in figures of speech.
But the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech, but I will tell you plainly about the Father.
26 In that day, you will ask in my Name.
And I do not tell you that I will pray to the Father for you, 27 because the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and believed that I came forth from God.
28 I came out from the Father, and I have come into the world.
Again, I leave the world and return to the Father.
29 His disciples said to him, 'Behold, now you speak plainly, not in figures of speech.

30 Now we know that you know all things and we do not need for anyone to ask questions from you.
By this we believe that you came forth from God.
31 Jesus answered them, 'Do you now believe? 32 Behold, the time is coming, yes, and it has now come, when you will be scattered, everyone to his own place, and you will desert me.
Yet, I am not alone, because the Father is with me.
33 I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace.
In the world you have distress,c but rejoice! I have overcome the world.

Day 02-Jun-2023 Friday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)

St Nikephoros the Confessor, patriarch of Constantinople (829)

He was born in Constantinople around 758, of pious parents: his father had been exiled under Constantine Copronymus for his steadfast veneration of the holy icons. Nikephoros served in the imperial palace as a secretary, but later renounced worldly success to struggle in monastic life near Constantinople. He built and administered a monastery which soon became filled with monks; but he himself never took the monastic habit, feeling himself unworthy. Though a layman, he took part in the Seventh Ecumenical Council at the request of the Emperor and Patriarch because of his remarkable knowledge of Holy Scripture. Much against his will, he was made Patriarch of Constantinople at the death of Patriarch Tarasios. He was made a monk, then elevated through all the priestly orders in a few days, then enthroned at St Sophia in 806.

A few years later, the Emperor Leo the Armenian took the throne. Patriarch Nikephoros, as was customary, sent him a Confession of the Orthodox Faith to sign. Leo put off signing the document until his coronation, then revealed himself to be an Iconoclast heretic. The Patriarch tried quietly to bring him back to the Orthodox faith, but to no avail. When the Emperor, in his turn, tried to make the holy Nikephoros bow to iconoclasm, the Patriarch clearly and publicly upheld the veneration of the holy Icons. For this he was deposed and driven into exile at the Monastery of St Theodore, which he himself had founded. Here he reposed, having served for nine years as Patriarch, and thirteen years in exile and privation.

Holy New Martyr Constantine (1819)

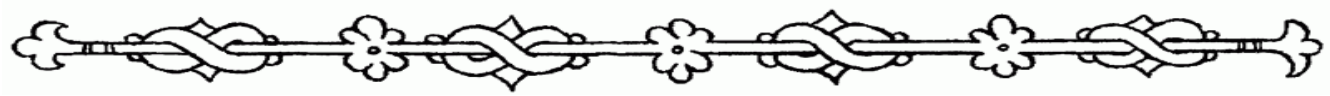
He was born a Muslim on the island of Lesbos (Mitylene), but became convinced of the truth of Christ after he was healed of a serious illness by the aid of holy water in a church. He traveled to the Holy Mountain and was baptised at the monastery of Kapsokalyvia. Later, he was seized by the Turks, who first tortured him viciously and, when he would not deny the Faith, hanged him in Constantinople.

Hieromartyr Erazmo of Ochrid (303)

"This saint was born in Antioch and lived in the reigns of Diocletian and Maximian. He lived in strict asceticism on Mount Lebanon, and was endowed by God with great wonderworking gifts. As a bishop, he set out to preach the Gospel. Arriving at the city of Ochrid, he restored the son of a man called Anastasius to life by his prayers, and baptised him. At this time, Erazmo

baptised many other pagans and tore down the idolatrous altar in Ochrid. For this he was denounced to the Emperor Maximian, who was at that time staying in Illyria. The Emperor brought him before the copper image of Zeus, and ordered him to bring sacrifices and worship the idol. St Erazmo, by his power, caused a terrible dragon to come out of the statue, which terrified all the people. The saint then worked another wonder, and the dragon died. Then the saint preached Christ and baptised 20,000 souls. The furious Emperor commanded that all 20,000 be beheaded, and put Erazmo to harsh torture, before throwing him into prison. But an angel of God appeared to him, as once to the Apostle Peter, and led him out of the prison. After that, this servant of God went to Campania, where he preached the Gospel to the people, then returned again to the town of Hermelia, where he withdrew to a cave and lived in asceticism for the rest of his days. At the time of his death, he prostrated three times towards the East and, with upraised hands, prayed to God to forgive and give eternal life to all those who would, with faith, call upon his name. At the end of his prayer, a voice was heard from heaven: 'Let it be as thou hast asked, My little healer Erazmo!' The saint looked up once more to heaven with great joy and saw a wreath of glory descending upon him, and a choir of angels, prophets, apostles and martyrs waiting to receive his holy soul. He finally cried: 'Lord, receive my spirit!', and breathed his last, in about the year 303. The cave and chapel of St Erazmo stand to this day not far from Ochrid, and from there is proclaimed to this day the great power of the man of God, Erazmo the hieromartyr." (Prologue)

Note: St Erazmo is commemorated on May 4th in the Slavonic Menaion, but St Nikolai Velomirovich gives today as the date on which he was been commemorated in Ochrid "from time immemorial".



Day 02-Jun-2023 Friday

Fast day (Wine and Oil allowed)
Readings of the day: Acts 27:1-44; John 17:18-26
27 When it was determined that we should sail for Italy, the authorities delivered
Paul and other prisoners to a centurion named Julius, of the Imperial regiment.
2We boarded a ship from Adramyttium which was about to sail to various places
on the coast of Asia and put to sea.
Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, traveled with us.
3The next day, we landed at Sidon.
Julius treated Paul with kindness and gave him permission to visit his friends and
to be cared for.
4Putting to sea from there, we sailed under [the shelter of] Cyprus because the
winds were contrary.
5After sailing across the open sea off [the coasts of] Cilicia and Pamphylia, we
arrived in Myra, a city of Lycia.
6 There, the centurion found a ship sailing from Alexandria to Italy, and he put us
on board.
7 After sailing slowly for many days, we arrived with difficulty near Cnidus.
The wind did not allow us to go further [on course], and we sailed under the shelter
of Crete, off Salmone.
8 We continued along the coast and arrived at a place called 'Fair Havens,' near
the city of Lasea.
9 A great deal of time had been lost and the voyage was now dangerous because
they were already being rationed with food.
Paul gave them this warning: 10 'Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will result in
injuries and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also of our lives!' 11
However, the centurion gave more heed to the master and to the owner of the ship
than to what Paul was saying.
12 Since the haven was not suitable to spend the winter, the majority was in favor
of continuing and to do our utmost to reach Phoenix and winter there.
This is a port of Crete which faces both the northeast and the southeast.
13 When the south wind began to blow softly, they thought that their goal was
within reach.
Having lifted the anchor, they sailed along [the coast of] Crete, close to shore.
14 But before long, a violent wind called 'the northeasternb' rushed down from the
island!c 15 The ship was caught and could not face the wind.
We had to yield to the wind and the ship was driven along.
16 Sailing under the shelter of a small island called Clauda, we were able, with

difficulty, to secure the lifeboat.
17 After the crew had hoisted it up, they used it to help reinforce the ship.
Fearing that they would run aground on the Syrtis sand bars, they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship drift along.
18 We were so battered by the storm that the next day, the men began to throw things overboard.
19 On the third day, they threw out the ship's tackle with their own hands.
20 When neither sun nor stars had shone on us for many days, and with a major storm pressing on us, all hope that we would be saved was now taken away.
21 As the men had been for a long time without food, Paul stood up among them and said, 'Sirs, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete; then you would have avoided this injury and loss.
22 Now, I encourage you to keep your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship.
23 For last night, an angel of the God to whom I belong and to whom I offer divine serviced stood by me.
24 He said: 'Do not be afraid, Paul! You must stand before Caesar.
Behold, God has granted you [the life] all those who sail with you.
25 Therefore, sirs, be of good cheer! For I believe God, that it will be just as it has been spoken to me.
26 However, we must run aground on some island.
27 On the fourteenth night, at about midnight, as we were driven back and forth in the Adriatic Sea, the sailors surmised that they were approaching some land.
28 They measured the depth of water and found twenty fathoms.
a A little while later, they took soundings again and found fifteen fathoms.
29 Fearing that we would run aground on rocky ground, they let down four anchors from the stern, hoping to hold steady until daylight.
30 Trying to escape from the ship, sailors lowered the lifeboat into the sea, pretending that they would lay out anchors from the bow.
31 Paul then said to the centurion and to the soldiers, 'Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved!' 32 So the soldiers cut away the ropes of the lifeboat and let it fall off.
33 As the day was coming on, Paul begged them all to take some food, saying, 'This day is the fourteenth day that you wait and continue fasting, taking nothing.
34 Now, I urge you to take some food! This is for your safety, and not a hair will perish from any of your heads.
35 After saying this and having taken bread, he gave thanks to God in the presence of all.
Then he broke it and began to eat.
36 At this, they all cheered up and also took food.
37 In all, we were two hundred seventy-six souls on the ship.
38 When they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship by throwing out the wheat into the sea.

39 When day came, they did not recognize the land but noticed a cove with a beach, and they decided to try to drive the ship onto it.
40 Casting off the anchors, they left them in the sea, at the same time untying the rudder ropes.
Hoisting up the foresail to the wind, they made for the beach.
41 But coming to a place with cross-currents,c they beached the vessel.
The front of the ship struck and remained immovable while the stern began to break up by the violence of the waves.
42 The soldiers' advice was to kill the prisoners, so that none of them would swim out and escape.
43 But the centurion, desiring to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their plan.
He gave orders that those who could swim should throw themselves overboard first and go to shore.
44 The rest should follow, some on planks, and some on other things from the ship.
And so it was that they all escaped safely to the land.
Gospel reading:

18 As you sent me into the world, I too have sent them into the world.
19 I sanctify myself for their sake, so that they too may be sanctified in truth.
20 I do not pray only for these, but also for those who [will] believe in me through their word, 21 so that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you.
May they be one in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me.
22 The glory which you have given me, I have given to them, so that they may be one even as we are one; 23 I in them, and you in me.
May they be perfected into one, so that the world may know that you sent me, and [that you have] loved them, even as you have loved me.

Day 03-Jun-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Holy Martyr Lucillian and those with him (270)

Lucilian spent most of his life as a pagan priest. In advanced old age, he learned the truth of the Christian faith and was baptized. The conversion of so public a figure quickly attracted attention, and Lucilian was brought to trial in Nicomedia. After enduring many tortures he was imprisoned with four young Christians, scarcely older than children: Claudius, Hypatius, Paul and Dionysius. When they were brouht before Silvanos the governor, all five confessed their faith and were sentenced to death and cast into a fiery furnace. When they miraculously emerged unharmed, they were taken to Byzantium, where the four young men were beheaded and Lucillian was crucified. A maiden named Paula openly carried away the martyrs' bodies and buried them. For this she in turn was tortured and, refusing to renounce her faith in Christ, beheaded. This was in the reign of the Emperor Aurelian. A church was built in their honor in Constantinople.

Hieromartyr Lucian (2nd c.)

He was a Roman nobleman, a disciple of the Apostle Peter. Pope Clement sent him, along with St Dionysius the Areopagite, to preach the Gospel in Gaul, ordaining them both as bishops before they left. The Emperor Domitian later sent soldiers to Rome to seize Christian evangelists. They killed St Dionysius in Rome, then, hearing of the work of St Lucian, tracked him until found him in what is now Belgium. There he was beheaded along with his two fellow-missionaries, Maxianus the priest and Julian the deacon. A church was built over his relics.

Holy Martyr Dimitri, Tsarevich of Russia (1591)

He was murdered at the age of eight by the evil designs of Boris Godunov, in the town of Uglich. After his death he appeared to a monk and accurately foretold Boris Godunov's death. Countless miracles were worked at the grave of the Tsarevich. When his tomb was opened fifteen years after his death, his relics were found whole and incorrupt, and were solemnly buried in the Church of the Archangel Michael in Moscow.

The circumstances of Boris Godunov's death are worth telling. He first tried to kill the Tsarevich using the strongest poison, but it had no effect. He then had the child publicly beheaded. Not long afterwards a 'false Dimitri' arose, claiming to be the Tsarevich, and rallied a great army against Godunov. Godunov was driven to such a desperate position that he took his own life by poison, the 'remedy' he had intended for the true Dimitri.

Day 03-Jun-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Acts 28:1-31; John 21, 15-25

Once safe on the shore, we learned that the island was called Malta. 2The natives showed us unusual kindness; they kindled a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold. 3But as Paul was gathering a bundle of sticks and placing them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself on his hand. 4When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said one to another, 'There is no doubt that this man is a murderer!
He has escaped from the sea but Justice has not allowed him to live.'
5 However, Paul shook off the creature into the fire and remained unharmed 6 Nevertheless, they expected that he would have swollen or suddenly fallen down dead. After watching for a long time and seeing nothing bad happen to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god! 7 Now, in the vicinity of that place were lands belonging to the leader of the island, [a man] named Publius who welcomed us and courteously hosted us for three days. 8 It also happened that Publius' father was bedridden, sick with fever and dysentery. Paul went to see him, prayed, and laying his hands on him, healed him. 9 After this had taken place, the rest of the people who had diseases in the island also came, and they were cured. 10 They honored us in many ways, and when we sailed off, put on board the things that we needed.
11 Three months later, we set sail in a ship from Alexandria which had wintered in the island, whose figurehead was 'The Twin Brothers.'
12 Touching at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days. 13 From there, we circled around [the coastline of Sicily] and arrived at Rhegium. The following day, a south wind sprang up and on the second day, we arrived in Puteoli. 14 There, we found brethren who entreated us to stay with them for seven days. And so, we approached Rome. 15 From there, having heard of us, the brethren came to meet us as far as The Market of Appius and The Three Taverns. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage. 16 When we reached Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard, but Paul was allowed to stay by himself with the soldier who guarded him.
17 Three days later, Paul called together those who were the leaders of the Jews. When they had assembled, he said to them, 'Brothers, although I have done nothing against the people or the customs of our fathers, I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. 18 After putting me on trial, the Romans wanted to release me because there was no grounds to put me to death. 19 But when the Jews spoke against it, I was forced to appeal to Caesar,

not that I had anything about which to accuse my nation.
20 For this reason, therefore, I asked to see you and to speak with you, for it is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.'
21 They answered him, 'We have not received letters from Judea concerning you, and no brother has come here to make a report or speak any evil of you. 22 But we desire to hear from you what you think because it is known to us that everywhere, people speak against this sect.' 23 After making an appointment with Paul for a certain day, many more people visited him at his place of residence. From morning until evening, he explained and bore witness about [the things of] the Kingdom of God. He also tried to convince the Jews concerning Jesus, [quoting] both from the law of Moses and from the prophets. 24 Some believed what was spoken, and others did not. 25 Although disagreeing among themselves, they left after Paul had spoken one [last] word, 'Rightly did the Holy Spirit speak to our fathers through Isaias (Isaiah) the prophet,
26 saying: 'Go to this people and say: You will keep on hearing but never understand! You will keep on seeing but never perceive! For this people's heart has grown callous, Their ears are dull of hearing, And they have closed their eyes, For fear that should see with their eyes, hear with their ears, Understand with their heart, and would repent, And I would heal them.' 28 Therefore, you should know that God's salvation is sent to the nations; they will listen!' 29 After Paul said these words, the Jews departed with a great dispute among themselves.
30 So Paul stayed two whole years in his own rented house, receiving everyone who came to visit him. 31 With all boldness and without hindrance, he proclaimed the Kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel Reading:

15 When they had eaten their breakfast, Jesus asked Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you loved me more than these?"a Peter replied, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I have affection for you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' 16 Again, Jesus asked a second time, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me?' Peter replied, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I have affection for you.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend my sheep.'
17 A third time, Jesus asked, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you have affection for me?' Peter was grieved because Jesus asked him the third time, 'Do you have affection for me?' He said, 'Lord, you know everything! You know that I have affection for you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep!
18 Amen, amen, I tell you; when you were young, you dressed yourself, and you walked where you wanted to. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.'
19 Now, Jesus said this to indicate by what kind of death Peter would glorify God. When he had said this, he said to Peter, 'Follow me!' 20 Then Peter, turning around, saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following [them]. (This was

the disciple who had also reclined near Jesus' breast at the supper and asked, 'Lord, who is going to betray you?') 21 Peter, seeing him, asked Jesus, 'Lord, what about this man?' 22 Jesus answered, 'If I desire that he stay until I come, what is that to you? You follow me.'
23 Therefore, this saying went out among the brethren, that this disciple would not die. Yet, Jesus did not say to Peter that he would not die, but, 'If I desire that he stay until I come, what is that to you?'
24 This is the disciple who bears witness about these things and who wrote these things. We know that his testimony is true. 25 There are also many other things which Jesus did. If they were all written, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

Day 04-Jun-2023 Sunday

Pentecost, Fast Free

St Metrophanes, Archbishop of Constantinople (325)

He was born into a pagan family, but his father Dometius, along with all his family, became Christians and went to Byzantium to escape persecution in Rome. Dometius was ordained a priest and in time became Bishop of Byzantium. When Dometius died, his elder son Probus became Bishop; then when Probus died, Dometius' second son Metrophanes succeeded him. Metrophanes was enthroned around the time that Constantine the Great was establishing Byzantium as the new capital of the Roman Empire. He sent a delegate to the First Ecumenical Council in 325, since he was unable to attend due to age and infirmity. The Emperor Constantine loved Metrophanes as a father and urged the entire Council to visit the ailing Bishop. Ten days later he died.

Apolytikion

Proclaiming the great myst'ry, the Godhead in Three Persons, thou didst make most clear unto all men Christ's saving dispensation. A shepherd to sheep endowed with speech, thou dravest off the spiritual wolves, and didst save from their destruction and savagery the lambs of Christ God, who cried out: Glory to Him that hath given thee strength. Glory to Him that hath crowned thee. Glory to Him that confirmed the pure Orthodox Faith through thee.

Holy Myrrh-bearers Mary and Martha, sisters of St Lazarus (1st c.)

Mary and Martha, with their brother Lazarus, were especially devoted disciples of our Lord; their story up to the time of the Resurrection can be found in Luke 10 and John 11-12. Mary and Martha were among the Myrrh-bearing women. They, with their brother, reposed in Cyprus, where Lazarus became first Bishop of Kition after he was raised from death by Christ.

An ancient tradition holds that Lazarus was thirty years old when he was restored to life by the Lord, and that he lived another thirty years. After he was raised from the dead, he never again laughed; but once, when he saw someone stealing a clay pot, he smiled and said, 'Clay stealing clay.' His name is a Greek version of Eleazar, meaning 'God has helped.'

Holy Martyr Concordius

Day 04-Jun-2023 Sunday

Pentecost, Fast Free

Pentecost
Acts 2:1-11; John 7:37-52; 8:12

Epistle Reading: Acts of the Apostles 2:1-11
WHEN THE DAY of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them.
And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his own language.
And they were amazed and wondered, saying, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?
And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontos and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians, we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.'

Gospel Reading: Pentecost John 7:37-52; 8:12

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, 'If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink.
He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water." Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.
When they heard these words, some of the people said, 'This is really the prophet.' Others said, 'This is the Christ.' But some said, 'Is the Christ to come from Galilee? Has not the scripture said that the Christ is descended from David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?'
So there was a division among the people over him. Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.

The officers then went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, 'Why did you not bring him?' The officers answered, 'No man ever spoke like this man!' The Pharisees answered them, 'Are you led astray, you also? Have any of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him?
But this crowd, who do not know the law, are accursed.' Nikodemos, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them,
'Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?' They replied, 'Are you from Galilee too? Search and you will see that no prophet is to rise from Galilee.'
Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.' .

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING

Today, we celebrate the descending of the Holy Spirit on us and dwelling with us. The Holy Church was established through this event, when, on the day of Pentecost fifty days after the Resurrection of the Lord, the Spirit came upon the Apostles on Mount Sion with ‘a sound like the rush of a violent wind.’
In this way, was the Church, the body of Christ, brought into being, and the Church began to live its life in the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit began to live within the Church. And through the apostolic succession the Holy Spirit continues to live in the Church until this day. Hopefully, today, you are reading this sermon in the church, where you regularly worship.
At the time this text is being prepared, churches have had to close their doors, as so many people are dying daily of the current pandemic. It may be consoling to think, during such difficult times, that the Holy Spirit, truly, is ‘everywhere present’, and that He is ‘the Heavenly King’ and ‘the Comforter’, who can find us wherever we might be. After all, we ask Him to ‘come and dwell in us.’
We, of course, live the action of the Holy Spirit within the Church, within the body of Christ, and we do not look for it elsewhere, for there are also false spirits, which try to trick us on to deceptive paths.
Instead, bearing within us the gifts given to us in and by the Church, e.g. in baptism, Holy Communion, and confession, we can with these gifts survive through such difficult times, in so far as we remain faithful in our hearts to Christ and to His Spirit.
The Holy Spirit lives in our Church, in the sacraments, in the Scriptures, in the souls of the faithful. The holiness of the Church and of the saints springs from the Holy Spirit.

Priesthood is established by the Holy Spirit. Our souls are nourished by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and when we feel far from it, in times of spiritual struggle, we may say with groaning, as did St Silouan the Athonite: ‘My soul yearns after You, O Lord, and I seek You in tears. Look upon my affliction, and lighten my darkness, that my soul may rejoice again.’

The question we need to ask ourselves is, whether or not we make it possible for the Holy Spirit to continue dwelling in us and in our Church.

As Orthodox Christians, we need both the correct faith but also a life corresponding to this faith to enable the active presence of the Holy Spirit in our communities and our personal lives. That our Church is called ‘Holy’ demands from us, too, an attitude of continuous repentance and the desire to become more and more similar to our Lord, Jesus Christ.

It is very serious, for example, that whilst thousands of people have died owing to the present pandemic, the figure of those who were not allowed even to be born into this world is far higher.

Other reprehensible activity that our world is full of, such as, gambling, sorcery, occult, indecent media on the internet, drugs, adultery, immoral relationships, etc., all this is extremely serious from a spiritual and moral point of view for the whole of humanity, and for the Church.

Those living a conscientious Christian life, who have not been involved with any of the above-mentioned evils, should nonetheless not think that they are perfectly all right.

We all have sinned and we all fall short of the holiness of Christ and His Holy Spirit.

St Silouan teaches that we can lose the love of Christ through ‘pride and conceit, hostility, fault-finding and envy,’ but also ‘because of an incontinent thought or attachment to earthly things.’ Let us all, therefore, join our hearts and minds to these words of the Kneeling Prayers of Pentecost which are said in the Vespers this afternoon and, putting our full trust in our meek and humble Lord, say: ‘Lord, Measure our wickedness according to the measure of Your bounties.

Set over against the multitude of our transgressions Your boundless compassion. Look down from Your holy habitation, from heaven, Lord, and bless Your people, who await Your rich mercy.’ Printed by Athina Press

Hieromonk Melchisedec

Day 05-Jun-2023 Monday

Monday of the Holy Spirit; Fast Free

Hieromartyr Dorotheus, bishop of Tyre (361)

He became Bishop of Tyre in Phoenecia during the reign of Diocletian. The persecutions under Diocletian and Maximian drove him to Thrace; after their death he returned to Tyre. Persecution broke out again under Julian the Apostate, and Dorotheus was seized and tortured to death at the age of 107. He wrote learned writings in both Greek and Latin, telling the lives of the Prophets and the Saints.

Our Holy Father Theodore the Hermit and Wonderworker (583)

He lived for many years as a hermit in the wilderness of the Jordan, and after long and hard ascetic struggle was granted the gift of wonderworking. Once he travelled by ship to Constantinople, and the ship went off course in a storm. The drinking water ran out, and the crew and passengers were near death from thirst. Theodore prayed to God, made the sign of the cross over the sea, and told the crew to drink the seawater. When they did so, they found to their astonishment that it was fresh and sweet. When the people began to honor him, he begged them only to thank God, who had worked the wonder. He reposed in peace.

Blessed Igor-George, tonsured Gabriel, great prince of Chernigov and Kiev (1147)

"Persecuted by his kinsfolk, he left the world and became a monk. The citizens of Kiev, disgusted with the Olgovitch dynasty [of which he had been prince], determined to exterminate it. They hurried to the monastery, seized the young and innocent schema-monk and killed him. For this evil-doing, much misfortune fell on the inhabitants of Kiev, but candles were several times seen to light of themselves on the grave of this blessed monk, and a fiery column appeared over the church where he was buried." (Prologue)

Blessed Constantine, Metropolitan of Kiev (1159)

In his day there was great disorder among the princes of Russia and in the Russian Church. One of the rival princes appointed a monk named Kim as Metropolitan of Kiev without seeking the blessing of the Patriarch of Constantinople, as was still done at that time. The Patriarch sent Metropolitan Constantine to investigate, and he deposed Kim and banished the priests whom Kim had ordained. This led to strife among the people, some of whom supported Constantine, some Kim. Finally, at the request of the princes, the Patriarch sent a third Metropolitan, and both Kim and Constantine were removed.

When Constantine died in 1159, his will ordered that he not be buried, but

cast out to be eaten by dogs, since he felt that he was guilty of sowing discord in the Church. Horrified, but unwilling to go against his last wishes, the people threw his body outside as he had ordered. During the three days that it lay exposed, Kiev was wracked with thunderstorms and earth tremors, in which eight people were killed. Finally the Prince of Kiev ordered that the Metropolitan's body be buried in the church, and the weather immediately became calm.

10 Martyrs of Egypt

Day 05-Jun-2023 Monday

Monday of the Holy Spirit; Fast Free
Readings of the day: Ephesians 5:9-19; Matthew 18:10-20
9 for the fruit of the Spirit is in all [manner of] goodness, righteousness and truth.
10 Discern what is wellpleasing to the Lord! 11 Have no fellowship with the vaina works of darkness, but rather, expose them for what they are.
12 It is a shame even to speak about the things which these people do in secret!
13 But all things are revealed when they are exposed to the light.
14 Therefore, it is said: Awake, you sleeper, arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.
b 15 Therefore, watch carefully how you live, not as unwise, but as wise [people],
16 making good use of time, because the days are evil.
17 Do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.
18 Do not get drunk with wine – this is reckless living – but be filled with the Spirit.
19 Speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs! Sing and chant to the Lord in your heart;

Gospel Reading:
10 Do not despise any of these little ones, for I tell you that in heaven, their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.
11 For the Son of Man has come to save the lost.
b The parable of the lost sheep 12 What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine to go into the mountains and look for the one that has gone astray? 13 Amen, I tell you: if he finds it, he rejoices over this one more than over the ninety-nine which did not go astray.
14 Likewise, it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that any of these little ones should perish.
15 If your brother sins against you, go, show him his fault between you and him alone.
If he listens to you, you have gained back your brother! 16 But if he does not listen, take one or two more with you, so that at the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.
17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the Church.
If he refuses to hear the Church also, let him be to you as a Gentile or a tax collector.
18 Amen, I tell you that whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in

heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven.
19 Again, I tell you that if two of you will agree on earth concerning anything they will ask, it will be done for them by my Father who is in heaven.
20 Indeed, where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there I am among them.
g

Day 06-Jun-2023 Tuesday

1st Tuesday after Pentecost; Fast Free

St Hilarion the New, abbot of the Dalmatian Monastery (845)

He was born in 775 in Cappadocia. He became abbot of the Monastery of Dalmatus, where he fervently defended the icons against the attacks of the Emperor Leo the Armenian. He was exiled twice, first by Leo, then by Theophilus, but was finally freed by the Empress Theodora and again became abbot of the monastery, where he served until his repose.

Our Holy Mothers the Martyrs Archelaïs, Thekla and Susanna (293)

"As pure and virginal nuns, they lived the ascetic life in an unknown monastery near Rome. When a persecution of Christians arose under the wicked Emperor Diocletian, they fled to Campania and settled near the town of Nola. Their holy life could not be concealed, and people from nearby began to come to them for counsel, instruction and help in various trials and sicknesses, and they were finally seized by the pagans and taken for trial. They publicly and freely confessed their faith in Christ. When the judge, Leontius, questioned the holy Archelaïs about the Christian faith, she replied: 'It is by the power of Christ that I overcome the power of the devil and teach the people understanding and knowledge of the one, true God. By the name of my Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, it is given that, through me His servant, the sick find healing.' All three maidens were whipped, flogged with heavy staves, left to languish in prison and finally beheaded. When they were led out to the scaffold, angels appeared to them, which were seen by some of the executioners and inspired such fear in them that they dared not lift up their swords against the holy maidens. They, however, urged the executioners to finish their task. And thus, as lambs, were they beheaded in the year 293, and went to the Kingdom of Christ to rest in eternity and delight in beholding the face of God." (Prologue)

St Bessarion the Wonderworker of Egypt (466)

He is commemorated today in the Slavic Menaion. See February 20, the date of his commemoration in the Greek Synaxarion.

Day 06-Jun-2023 Tuesday

1st Tuesday after Pentecost; Fast Free
Readings of the day: Romans 1:1-7, 13-17; Matthew 4:25-5:13
1 Greetings Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for
the Good News of God, 2 which he promised beforehand through his prophets in
the Holy Scriptures.
3 [This is the Good News] concerning his Son, who was born of the seed of David
according to the flesh, 4 who was declared to be the Son of God with power,
according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ
our Lord.
5 Through him, we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience of faith
among all the nations, for his Name's sake.
6 Among them, you are also called to belong to Jesus Christ.
7 To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and
peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
13 Now, I do not desire to have you unaware, brethren, that I have often planned
to come to you, but so far, I have been hindered.
[My goal] is that I might have some fruit among you also, even as I have among
the rest of the Gentiles.
14 I am debtor both to Greeks and to foreigners, both to the wise and to the
foolish.
15 This is why there is so much eagerness on my part to preach the Good News to
you also who are in Rome 16 Indeed, I am not ashamed of the Good News of
Christ!a It is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew
first, and also for the Greek.
17 For in the Gospel God's righteousness is revealed from faith to faith.
As it is written, 'But the righteous shall live by faith.

Gospel Reading:
25 Great crowds from Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and from beyond the
Jordan followed him.
5 The sermon on the mount Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up to the mountain
and when he had sat down, his disciples came to him.
2He began to speak and to teach them, saying: 3Blessed are the poor in spirit, for
theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven!e 4Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall
be comforted!f 5Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth!g Blessed
are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled! 7

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy! 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God! 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God! 10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven! 11 Blessed are you when people revile you, persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake! 12 Rejoice, and be extremely glad, for great is your reward in heaven! Indeed, this is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you! 13 You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is then good for nothing, only to be cast out and trampled under foot.

Day 07-Jun-2023 Wednesday

1st Wednesday after Pentecost; Fast Free

Martyr Theodotus of Ancyra (303)

A secret Christian living in Ancyra, he would recover the bodies of the martyrs and give them honorable burial: it was he who buried the holy relics of the Virgin Martyrs Tecusa and her seven companions (May 8). When he was discovered by the pagan authorites, they seized him, tortured him and finally beheaded him.

Hieromartyr Marcellinus, pope of Rome (304)

"When the Emperor Diocletian summoned him and threatened him with torture, he offered sacrifice to idols and was, because of this, rewarded by the Emperor with a costly garment. But Marcellinus repented bitterly and began to weep both day and night for his rejection of Christ, even as the Apostle Peter had before him. A synod of bishops was held at that time in Campania, and the Pope dressed himself in sackcloth and sprinkled ashes on his head, and, going before the Synod, confessed his sin and asked them to judge him. The fathers said: 'Let him judge himself.' Then he said: 'I strip myself of the sacerdotal rank of which I am not worthy; and, further, let my body not be buried after my death, but let it be thrown to the dogs.' Having said this, he pronounced a curse on any who should dare to bury him. He then went to the Emperor Diocletian and, casting the precious garment in front of him, confessed his faith in Christ and cursed the idols. The enraged Emperor ordered that he be tortured and killed outside the city, together with three other men: Claudius, Cyrinus and Antoninus. The bodies of these three were buried at once, but the Pope's body lay there for thirty-six days. Then St Peter appeared to Marcellus, the new Pope, and told him to bury Marcellinus' body, saying: 'Whoso humbleth himself shall be exalted.' " (Prologue)

St Daniel of Skete in Egypt (5th c.)

He was a disciple of St Arsenios the great and abbot of the Scetis in Egypt (the monastic system known as the "Skete" takes its name from Scetis). He lived the communal monastic life for forty years, then in 420 retired to the desert, where he remained until his repose.

From the Prologue: "A saint has a very sensitive conscience. What ordinary people may consider a small sin, a saint sees as a great crime. It is said of Abba Daniel that highwaymen attacked him on three occasions and took him off to the mountains. Twice he was rescued, but the third time, in attempting to escape, he struck one of them with a stone and killed him, and then made his escape. That murder lay on his conscience like a lead weight. In perplexity as

to what he should do, he went to Timothy, the Patriarch of Alexandria, and asked his advice. The Patriarch soothed him, and released him from all penance. But his conscience continued to gnaw at him, and he went to Rome, to the Pope. The Pope gave him the same reply as had the Patriarch. Still dissatisfied, Daniel visited the remaining patriarchs in turn; going to Constantinople, Antioch and Jerusalem, confessing to each of them and asking for advice. But he could find no peace. So he returned home to Alexandria and declared himself to the authorities as a murderer, and was flung into prison. At his trial before the governor, Daniel told how everything had come about, and pleaded that he might be killed too, that his soul might be saved from eternal fire. The governor was amazed at the whole thing, and said to him: 'Go your way, Father, and pray to God for me, even if you kill seven more!' Still dissatisfied with this, Daniel resolved to take a leper into his cell and care for him until he died, and then find another. He did as he had resolved, and in this way brought peace to his conscience."

Holy Martyrs Cyriaca, Valeria and Maria

Righteous Panagis

Day 07-Jun-2023 Wednesday

1st Wednesday after Pentecost; Fast Free
Readings of the day: Romans 1:18-27; Matthew 5:20-26
18 However, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of those who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because what is known of God is revealed in them, for God revealed it to them.
20 For since the creation of the world, his invisible things are clearly seen.
They are perceived through created things, even his everlasting power and divinity.
This is so that they may be without excuse,
21 because knowing God, they did not glorify him as God or give [him] thanks.
Instead, they became vain in their reasoning, and their senseless heart was darkened.
22 Thinking themselves to be wise, they became fools!
23 They exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for the likeness of an image of corruptible man, of birds, of four-footed animals, and creeping things.
24 Therefore, God also gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies should be dishonored among themselves.
25 Having exchanged the truth of God for a lie, they exalted and offered divine service to the creature rather than the Creator who is blessed forever.
Amen.
26 For this reason, God gave them up to vile passions: their women changed the natural function into what is against nature
27 and the men did likewise.
They abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their lust toward one another, men doing what is inappropriate with men, and receiving in themselves the due penalty of their error.

Gospel Reading:
20 Indeed, I tell you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.
21 You have heard that it was said of old, 'You shall not murder; and 'Whoever commits murder shall be in danger of the judgment.
22 But I tell you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.
Whoever calls his brother 'Raca!' shall be answerable to the Sanhedrin; and

whoever shall say, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of the fire of Gehenna.
23 If therefore you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has anything against you,
24 leave your gift there, before the altar.
First, go your way and be reconciled to your brother, and then offer your gift.
25 Find an agreement with your adversary as soon as possible, even as you are on your way to court, fearing that perhaps the prosecutor will deliver you to the judge, the judge to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison.
26 Amen, I tell you: you will not get out of there until you have paid the last penny.
e

Day 08-Jun-2023 Thursday

1st Thursday after Pentecost; Fast Free

St Ephraim, Patriarch of Antioch (545)

"During the reign of the Byzantine Emperor Anastasius, Ephraim was governor of the eastern regions. He was famed for his great piety and compassion, and was much esteemed for these virtues. When the rebuilding of Antioch, which had been destroyed by earthquake and fire, was put in hand, the Emperor ordered Ephraim to oversee the work. Ephraim performed this work with dilegence and love. There was among the ordinary workers a certain bishop who had left his see for unkown reasons and was working as a labourer. Not a soul knew that the man was a bishop. One day he lay down to take a rest from the exhausting work with the other labourers, and fell asleep. Ephraim glanced at him, and saw a flaming pillar rising above the man and reaching up to heaven. Amazed and frightened, Ephraim summoned him and bound him under oath to reveal who he was. The man hesitated a long time, but finally admitted that he was a bishop and foretold that Ephraim whould shortly be consecrated Patriarch of Antioch (the patriarchal throne having been empty since the old Patriarch, Euphrasius, perished in the earthquake). Ephraim was indeed elected and consecrated as Patriarch. For his goodness, purity and zeal for Orthodoxy, a great gift of wonderworking was given him by God. Once, in order to convince some heretic that Orthodoxy is the true Faith, he placed his omophor in the flames and prayed to God. The omophor remained unharmed in the fire for three hours. When the heretic saw this, he was afraid and cast his heresy aside. Ephraim entered peacefully into rest in 546." (Prologue)

Our Holy Mother Melania the Elder (410)

She was a wealthy and noble lady, born in Spain. Her husband and two of her children died and, seeing the vanity of worldly things, she travelled to Egypt to visit the monks at Nitria. She gave away most of her great wealth to the needy, and to Egyptian Christians being persecuted by the Arians. It is said that in three days she fed some 5,000 people. When the Orthodox in Egypt were exiled to Palestine, she went with them to Jerusalem, where she built a convent for virgins; she entered the convent herself, and reposed there in 410. Her grand-daughter, Melania the Younger, is commemorated on December 31.

St Zosimas, monk, of Phoenicia (Syria) (6th c.)

He labored in asceticism at a monastery near Tyre. Through his exceptional purity of life, he was granted the gift of prophecy. He foresaw the destruction

of Antioch by earthquake and, like Abraham pleading for Sodom, prostrated himself on the ground and prayed that the city not be completely destroyed. Once he was traveling in a remote place and a lion attacked and killed his mule. He commanded the lion to serve him in the mule's place; the lion immediately took up Zosimas' pack and carried it to Caesarea, where Zosimas released it. St Zosimas reposed in peace.

Translation of the Holy Relics of Theodore Stratelates

Martyr Kalliope

The unsung heroines of early Christianity, who suffered agonising death rather than disavow Jesus Christ, were anything but members of a weaker sex when they endured the atrocities and pain inflicted by persecutors of Christians with the same quiet courage of the bravest of men. Some of them were born with the fatal gift of beauty. They knew nothing but loving care in their lifetimes and were hardly equipped or prepared to suffer the cruelties of the enemies of Christ, nor were they inured to hardship and deprivation of their male counterparts that might have given them a body chemistry to better withstand physical abuse. They were not theologians, nor clergy of any manner, whose minds had been honed to a peak of devotion to the Saviour not only by study, meditation and prayer but by actual association with oppression and suffering and were, therefore, mentally prepared for the worst. They were for the most part sweet, innocent girls whose lifestyles were aimed at motherhood and not the endurance of horror and torture. Theirs had to be the greater courage, therefore, and no man would dispute it. One of the genuine heroines of third-century Christianity was a quite lovely girl with the pretty name of Kalliope who lived in the reign of the vicious Emperor Decius, an extremely callous and pompous monarch who took delight in barbarous acts, chief among which was the persecution of Christians for whom he had a hatred born of fear of their Lord. It is generally conceded that Nero was mad and that Decius was madder still; even though they were separated by two centuries they were two of a kind, the kind usually looked upon as the scourge of God. Had she been born in the twentieth century Kalliope may have been a candidate in a beauty contest, but in the third century her beauty indirectly made her a candidate for sainthood -- a contest she won at the expense of her life. When Kalliope reached the age of twenty-one she had already passed the age at which most women of that day married, but it was not for lack of suitors, which she had in great numbers. Her days were filled with activity, social and religious, and twenty-one years had come and gone seemingly unnoticed. When at last she seemed ready for marriage, a host of suitors clamoured for her hand. Among the would-be husbands was a pagan who would not take no for an answer. He sent word that were she to reject him in favour of another, especially a Christian, he would see to it that the pagan authorities called her before them for their well-known brand of justice. Kalliope did not hesitate to not only deny

this suitor, but made it plain that she would not marry him even if he were a Christian, a conversion which would have been highly unlikely as well as useless. The threat to her life was carried out and through the use of false rumour and accusation she was brought to trial before the magistrate. She stood accused of a variety of crimes against the state, ranging from a mockery of the pagan faith to treason against the state, all of which was attested to by a parade of well-paid false witnesses, none of whom had ever seen the girl. The rejected suitor stepped forth to offer a withdrawal of the charges against her if she would disavow Christ and become his pagan bride. The alternative was torture, and if that didn't bend her will, then it was death in a manner to be devised. If Kalliope had any fear or was the least bit hesitant, she did not show it, but instead she declared that the only mockery in this affair was the trial itself, and she furthermore asserted her faith in Jesus Christ. That was enough to seal her fate and she was led off to prison, a far cry from the comfort of her home with her loving parents. The deadly game had begun and the gentle Christian girl had to know the helplessness which leads to terror and which in turn weakens the will, but she gave no indication that she would change her mind. She was then put to the cruellest of tortures. Taken to a public square, she was bound to a post and mercilessly flogged until her clothing and flesh were in tatters. Her beautiful face was scarred with branding irons and salt was poured into her open wounds, and while the breath of life was still within her she was told to disavow Christ. When this gallant girl refused she was put to death. In 1957 AD a special synod allowed a liturgical service to be written by John Ramphos honouring St. Kalliope the Martyr, whose feast day is observed on June 8. St. Kalliope pray for us who lack your Faith, courage and strength.

Day 08-Jun-2023 Thursday

1st Thursday after Pentecost; Fast Free
Readings of the day: Romans 1:28-2:9; Matthew 5:27-32
28 Even as they refused to have God in their knowledge, God gave them up to a worthless mind, to do those things which are not fitting.
29 They have become filled with all [kinds of] unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, and malice.
They are also full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and evil habits.
[They are] secret slanderers, 30 backbiters, hateful of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, 31 without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, unforgiving, and unmerciful.
32 Knowing the ordinance of God, (that those who practice such things are worthy of death), they not only do these [very] things but also approve of those who practice them.
2 The judgment of God Therefore, you are without excuse, if you are judging! For in passing judgment on another, you condemn yourself, because you pass judgment and yet practice the same things.
2We know that the judgment of God is according to truth and against those who practice such things.
3 Do you think that you will escape the judgment of God if you judge those who practice such things and yet act the same? 4Or do you despise the riches of God's goodness, tolerance, and patience, not knowing that his goodness leads you to repentance? 5But according to your hardness and unrepentant heart, you are storing up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath, revelation, and of the righteous judgment of God.
6 He 'will pay back to everyone according to their works; 7 [which is] eternal life to those who by perseverance in good works seek glory, honor, and incorruptibility.
8 However, to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth but unrighteousness, there will be retribution and intense wrath, 9 oppression and anguish.
Trouble and distress will come to everyone who does evil, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Gospel Reading:
27 You have heard that it was said to the ancients, 'You shall not commit adultery;
28 but I tell you that anyone who gazes at a woman with a view to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

29 If your right eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it away from you!
Indeed, it is more profitable for you that one of your members should perish than
for your whole body to be cast into Gehenna.
30 If your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off, and throw it away from you!
It is more profitable for you that one of your members should perish, than for your
whole body to be cast into Gehenna.
31 It was also said, 'Whoever shall divorce his wife, let him give her a certificate of
divorce, 32 but I tell you that whoever divorces his wife (except for the cause of
sexual immorality), makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries a woman put
away in this manner commits adultery.

Day 09-Jun-2023 Friday

1st Friday after Pentecost; Fast Free

St Cyril, archbishop of Alexandria (444)

"St Cyril was... from Alexandria, born about the year 376, the nephew of Theophilus, Patriarch of Alexandria, who also instructed the Saint in his youth. Having first spent much time with the monks of Nitria, he later became the successor to his uncle's throne in 412. In 429, when Cyril heard tidings of the teachings of the new Patriarch of Constantinople, Nestorius, he began attempting through private letters to bring Nestorius to renounce his heretical teachings about the Incarnation; and when the heresiarch did not repent, Saint Cyril, together with Pope Celestine of Rome, led the Orthodox opposition to his error. Saint Cyril presided over the Third Ecumenical Council of the 200 holy Fathers in the year 431, who gathered in Ephesus under Saint Theodosius the Younger. At this Council, by his most wise words he put to shame and convicted the impious doctrine of Nestorius, who, although he was in town, refused to appear before Cyril. Saint Cyril, besides overthrowing the error of Nestorius, has left to the Church full commentaries on the Gospels of Luke and John. Having shepherded the Church of Christ for thirty-two years, he reposed in 444." (Great Horologion)

Today we commemorate St Cyril's repose. He is also commemorated on January 18, the date of his restoration to his see in Alexandria after he had been driven out by Nestorians.

St Columba of Iona (597)

He was born to a prominent noble family, the Ui-Niall clan of Ireland, but he forsook all worldly things and became a monk at a young age. He founded the monasteries of Derry and Durrow, and traveled as a missionary in Ireland for almost twenty years. In 565 he settled on the island of Iona, off the coast of Scotland; there he remained for 32 years, establishing the famous monastery of Iona and continuing in his missionary labors. He reposed in peace at Iona.

Saint Kyril of Belozersk (1427)

He was born in Moscow in 1337, and took up the monastic life while young. Though he desired a life of strict silence and solitude, he was made abbot of the Simonov Monastery against his will. After a few years, obeying a revelation from the most holy Theotokos, he left his abbacy and went to the wilderness of Belozersk (White Lake) to live as a hermit. Others gathered

there to live under his guidance, and in time the community became the Monastery of Belozersk. Saint Kyril was sought from far off as a staretz, or spiritual father, and was granted gifts of wonderworking. His humility was remarkable, as the following story shows.

Once one of his monks conceived a terrible hatred for Kyril, which tormented him for a whole year. Finally the monk worked up the courage to reveal his hatred to Kyril himself. Though the monk was full of shame and remorse at his malicious passion, Kyril comforted him and said, 'All the others are in error about me; only you have perceived my unworthiness.' Saint Kyril then forgave the man and sent him away with his blessing.

Saint Kyril reposed in peace in 1427, at the age of ninety.

3 Virgin-martyrs of Chios

Day 09-Jun-2023 Friday

1st Friday after Pentecost; Fast Free
Readings of the day: Romans 2:14-29; Matthew 5:33-41
14 (Indeed, when Gentiles who do not have the law do by nature the things of the law, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law, 15 by showing that the practical expression of the law is written in their hearts.
Their conscience bears witness, and their thoughts alternately accuse or defend them).
16 This is for the day when, according to my [proclamation of the] gospel, God, through Jesus Christ, will judge the secret thoughts of all.
17 Indeed, you [who] bear the name of Jew, you rely on the law and glory in God.
18 You know his will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law.
19 You are confident that you yourself are a guide of the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, 20 a corrector of the foolish and a teacher of infants, having in the law the form of knowledge and of the truth.
21 You therefore who teach another, [why] do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one should not steal, [why] do you steal? 22 You who say that a man should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? 23 You who glory in the law by your disobedience of the law, [why] do you dishonor God? 24 For 'the Name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,'a just as it is written.
About circumcision 25 Indeed, circumcision gains something if you are a doer of the law, but if you are a transgressor of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.
26 And so, if an uncircumcised man keeps the ordinances of the law, will not his uncircumcision be accounted as circumcision? 27 Will not the uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfills the law, judge you, who with the letter and circumcision are a transgressor of the law? 28 For one is not a Jew by being so outwardly, neither is that circumcision [true circumcision] which is outward in the flesh.
29 Instead, someone is a Jew by being one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter.
Truly, their praise is not from human beings but from God.
Gospel reading:

33 Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not swear falsely; you must fulfill your vows to the Lord.

34 But I tell you: do not swear at all! Neither by heaven, for it is the throne of God;
35 nor by the earth, for it is the footstool of his feet; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.
36 Do not even swear by your head because you cannot make a single hair white or black.
37 Instead, let your 'Yes' be 'Yes' and your 'No' be 'No.
Whatever goes beyond these is from the evil one.
Retaliation and love for one's enemies 38 You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.
a 39 But I tell you: do not resist one who is evil, but to whoever strikes you on your right cheek, present the other cheek as well.
40 If anyone sues you to take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also.
41 Whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him for two.

Day 10-Jun-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Hieromartyr Timothy, bishop of Prusa (362)

"For his great spiritual purity, God gave him the gift of wonderworking, and he healed all manner of diseases and pains among the people. During the reign of the evil Emperor Julian, who had renounced Christ, holy Timothy was thrown into prison. The faithful visited him there to listen to the wise teaching of their bishop. When this came to the Emperor's ears, he commanded that the executioner behead the Saint in the prison. This was in 362, and his soul entered into Paradise while his relics remained, full of miraculous power, to help the people and declare the power of the Lord." (Prologue [adapted])

Holy Martyrs Alexander and Antonina (313)

In Alexandria, the virgin Antonina was brought before Festus, the Governor, tortured for her faith in Christ, then thrown into prison. A Christian soldier named Alexander, who had never before seen or heard of Antonina, was commanded by an angel of God to go to her. Finding her, he gave her his military cloak, wrapping it about her head and body; and thus, with her head lowered, she was able to walk out of the prison while Alexander remained in her place. Alexander was brought before Festus, where he too confessed his faith in Christ. Antonina, learning of this, voluntarily came before the judge, who put both of them to hideous tortures, mutilating them in many ways before having them cast into a fire and burned alive.

A slightly different account says that Festus placed Antonina under guard in a brothel rather than a prison, so that her virginity might be defiled, and that it was from there that Alexander rescued her.

Festus, the Governor, was struck mute at the time of the holy martyrs' death, and was tormented by an evil spirit for seven days, at the end of which he died.

Hieromartyr Metrophanes, first Chinese priest, and the Chinese New Martyrs of the Boxer Uprising (1900)

> "The Holy Martyrs of China were native Chinese Orthodox Christians brought up in piety at the Russian Orthodox Mission in Peking, which had been founded in 1685. During the Boxer Rebellion of 1900 against the foreign powers occupying China, native Chinese Christians were commanded by the Boxers to renounce Christianity or be tortured to death. Two hundred and twenty-two members of the Peking Mission, led by their priest Metrophanes Tsi-Chung and his family, refused to deny Christ, and were deemed worthy of a martyric death." (Great Horologion)

Saint Bassian, Bishop of Lodi

Day 10-Jun-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Romans 1:7-12; Matthew 5:42-48

7 To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, that your faith is proclaimed throughout the whole world.
9 For God, to whom I offer divine service in my spirit in the Good News of his Son, is my witness; how unceasingly I always make mention of you in my prayers.
10 I request, if by any means now at last I may be blessed by the will of God to come to you.
11 For I long to see you, so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift with the purpose that you may be established;b 12 that is, that I with you may be encouraged in you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine.

Gospel Reading:

42 Give to whoever asks you, and do not deny whoever desires to borrow from you.
43 You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.
44 But I tell you: love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you! Pray for those who mistreat you and persecute you, 45 so that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven.
For he makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust.
46 And so, if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 If you only greet your friends, what more do you do than others? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 48 Therefore, be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Day 11-Jun-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Holy Apostles Bartholomew and Barnabas

Saint Bartholomew was one of the Twelve Apostles, a Galilean; the Gospel accounts say little more about him. It is said that, after receiving the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, he traveled in the service of the Gospel to Arabia and Persia, and brought to India a translation of the Gospel according to Matthew. Eusebius writes that one hundred years later Pantaenus, an illustrious Alexandrian scholar, found this gospel when he traveled in India. By most accounts Bartholomew ended his life in Armenia, where he met his martyrdom by crucifixion. According to many, he and Nathaniel are the same person: the Gospel accounts that speak of Bartholomew do not mention Nathaniel; and St John's Gospel,which mentions Nathanael as one of the Twelve, does not mention Bartholomew. But according to the Greek Synaxarion, Bartholomew and Simon the Zealot are one and the same.

Saint Barnabas was one of the Seventy, from Cyprus, a Levite and at one time a fellow-student with St Paul under Gamaliel. After Christ's Ascension, he led the Seventy until the Apostle Paul's conversion. He is mentioned often in the Acts of the Apostles, which describes some of his travels as a companion of St Paul. By all accounts, he was the first to preach the Gospel of Christ in Rome and in Milan. His wonder-working relics were discovered on the island of Cyprus in the time of the Emperor Zeno; on this basis the Church of Cyprus was established as an independent Church, since it had an apostolic foundation.

Apolytikion

O Holy Apostles, intercede to our merciful God, that He may grant our souls forgiveness of sins.

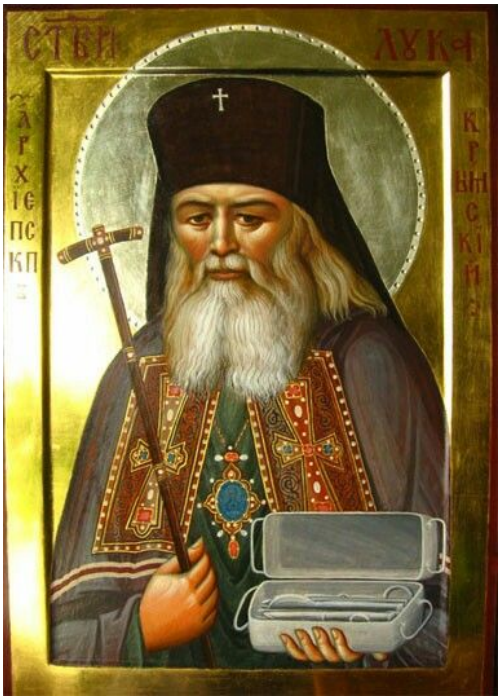
Kontakion

To the Church thou hast appeared as a great daystar; with thy teachings as thy rays and beams of awesome miracles, thou hast enlightened those praising thee, the Lord’s Apostle, O sacred Bartholomew.

Commemoration of the appearance of the Archangel Gabriel to a monk on Mt Athos, and the revelation of the hymn "It is Truly Meet" (Axion Estin (980)

A monk on the Holy Mountain was chanting the ancient hymn to the Most Holy Theotokos, "More honorable than the Cherubim..." (composed by St Cosmas the Hymnographer) in his cell, when the Archangel Gabriel appeared to him, disguised as a monk. The angel chanted the same hymn, but began it differently: "It is truly meet to call thee blessed, the Theotokos, the ever-blessed and most pure and Mother of our God. More honorable than the Cherubim..." Amazed at the hymn's beauty, the monk asked the stranger to write it down for him: the Angel inscribed it on a stone tablet with his finger, then vanished from sight. The tablet was brought to Constantinople and shown to the Emperor and the Patriarch as proof of the miracle. From that time, this version of the hymn began to be sung in the Divine Liturgy, as it is to this day.

Saint Luke, Bishop of Simferopol and Crimea,



The Blessed Surgeon, was born Valentin Felixovich Voino-Yasenetsky in April 14, 1877. Doctor of Medicine, Professor, and State Prize winner, since 1944 he was the Archbishop of Tambov and Michurinsk, and later of Simferopol and the Crimea. While he was serving the church as an Archbishop, he was also practicing as a surgeon and taught and published many books and articles on regional anesthesia and surgery. He is now known to be a world-famous pioneering surgeon. In November of 1995 he was announced as a Saint by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, and was officially glorified by the Patriarchate of Russia May 25, 1996. He is commemorated by the church June 11 the anniversary of his falling asleep in the Lord. Born with the name Valentine Felixovitch Voino-Yassentsky on April 27, 1877 in Kerch (east Crimea), his family members were civil servants to Lithuanian and Polish Kings. The family was impoverished over time but Saint Luke remembers that he received his religious inheritance from his pious father. His first true understanding of the Christian faith came from the New Testament given to him at his high school graduation by his principal. He had an outstanding secular training. Having exceptional drawing abilities, he graduated the Kiev Academy of Fine Arts. He decided however against pursuing art in favor of a career where he could help people who suffer, and chose to be a physician. In

1903 at the age of 26, he graduated from Great Prince St. Vladimir Medical School at the University of Kiev, and for a long time worked as a local district physician. An extraordinary medical student, he excelled at anatomy. His superior knowledge of anatomy served him throughout his surgical career. Out of compassion to the blindness that beggars were experiencing due to trachoma, Saint Luke studied ophthalmology at the Kiev ophthalmologic clinic. In a very short time he acquired a significant amount of ophthalmologic training. His knowledge of this subspecialty helped him treat not only his trachoma patients, but many other serious eye conditions as well. Another important event in Valentine's life was the marriage to his wife Anna, a nurse. They had four children. The family was transferred frequently to various regional health care facilities and from the very beginning Valentine never requested funds from his patients, nor would he turn anyone away because of his ethnic background or personal beliefs. When his wife died, God in setting the path for Valentine's Sainthood provided the family with Sofia Sergeevna who would be the joyful surrogate mother of his children during the harsh times ahead. Valentine never remarried. During his early career he published many scientific treatises and eventually became the head surgeon and professor of surgery at the hospital in Tashkent in March 1917. In October, Lenin took over the government and civil war erupted in Tashkent in January 1919. Lenin's government disfavored any religious witness. Valentine was under constant threat, especially when treating party members but he refused to operate under any circumstances without the Icon of the Mother of God. His results were outstanding. 'I ought to tell you that what God did to me as amazing and incomprehensible…My pursuing surgery completely satisfied the goal I always had to serve the poor and the suffering, to dispose all my strength for the comfort of their pains, and to help them in their needs.' These are some of the introductory comments from the memoirs of Saint Luke, that were kept by his secretary, E.P. Leikfeld. His words are not vainglorious, but a commentary on how God's plan was fulfilled through the life and example of Saint Luke. Living in the Ukraine during the oppressive period of communism, St. Luke stood out among his fellow physicians both as a surgeon and as a Christian. Even the communists coveted his talents for healing the body. Despite the dangers from the Lenin regime he fearlessly attended theological discussions arranged by Archpriest Mikhail Andeev. During this period when clergymen and pious people would prove their faith in blood, providence led the Archpriest to invite Valentine to the priesthood. Thus in 1921 at the age of 44 Valentine was ordained a priest. For two years, this exceptional individual was active not only in his pastoral work but in public and scientific activity. Eventually Fr. Valentine was arrested and put on trial, falsely accused of giving inappropriate surgical care to injured Red Army soldiers. At his trial in his characteristic fearless way he denounced the prosecutors claims by explaining: 'I cut people to save them. You, Mr. Public Prosecutor, why do you

cut their heads off?' Certainly the charges were never proven but since the Party had to be infallible Fr. Valentine was convicted to sixteen years imprisonment. Towards the end of his life he was worried if it would be permitted to chant 'Holy God" at his funeral. He last celebrated the Divine Liturgy on the feast of the Nativity of Christ in 1960, and his last sermon was on Forgiveness Sunday. His repose was June 11, 1961, the day of commemoration for 'All Saints who shone forth in the Land of Russia". The government made every effort to make Saint Luke's funeral as inconspicuous as possible. Buses were provided to hurry the funeral procession along the side-streets to the gravesite so there would be little fanfare and recognition. God had different plans for Saint Luke and a popular uprising occurred at the funeral. The faithful refused to be hurried. They boldly ignored, at peril to life and limb, the roadblocks to the central corridors. The mayor was angered because of the roses spread on the roads, and flung a basket away claiming that the roses were litter and trash on the streets. To the dismay of the government and to avoid an uprising, they conceded to allow the funeral to proceed for three and a half hours without interference. The roads were full and cars stopped everywhere. People had climbed on balconies, onto rooftops of houses. Such a funeral was a tribute of honor. The authorities wanted a silent event. It was witness to God's Glory that throughout the walk there was a constant chant of 'Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal have mercy on us". Saint Luke's prayers to have 'Holy God" chanted at his funeral during the atheistic times were answered! On March 17, 1996, St. Luke's remains were disinterred, with an estimated 40,000 people taking part. It is said that an indescribable aroma arose from his relics, while his heart was discovered incorrupt, a testament to the great love he bore towards Christ and his fellow men. Three days later on March 20, 1996, his relics were transferred to the Church of the Holy Trinity. His relics continue to work countless miracles, in the Church of the Holy Trinity in Simferopol, at Sagmata Monastery in Greece, and throughout the world.

Day 11-Jun-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Sunday Of All Saints
Hebrews 11:33-12:2; Matthew 10:32-33, 37-38; 19:27-30
33 Through faith, they overpowered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, became strong in weakness, grew mighty in war and caused foreign armies to flee.
35 Women received their dead by resurrection.
Others were tortured, not accepting their deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.
36 Others were tried by mocking and scourging, yes, by chains and imprisonment.
37 They were stoned, they were sawn apart, they were tempted and they were slain with the sword.
They went around in sheep and goat skins, being destitute, afflicted and ill-treated.
And yet the world was not worthy of them! 38 They wandered in deserts, mountains, caves, and the holes of the earth.
39 All of them received a testimony through their faith but they did not receive the promise 40 because God had made provision for us to have something better, and they were not to reach perfection apart from us.
12 God as our Father And so, seeing that we are surrounded by such a great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily entangles us.
Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith.
For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despising its shame, and he has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Gospel Reading: First Sunday after Pentecost: Sunday Of All Saints

32 Whoever confesses me before men I will also confess before my Father who is in heaven.
33 But whoever denies me in front of others I will also deny before my Father who is in heaven.
37 Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.
38 Whoever does not take his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me.

27 Then Peter said, 'Behold, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?' 28 Jesus said to them, 'Amen, I tell you that you who have followed me, at the regeneration, when the Son of Man will sit on the throne of his glory, you also will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.
29 Everyone who has left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, wife, children, or lands for my Name's sake will receive a hundred times [more] and will inherit eternal life.
30 But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first!'

SERMON ON THE EPISTLE READING

In today's Epistle, we heard that all the great Jewish Martyrs of Old Testament times, who suffered so terribly for the sake of their faithfulness to the true God, received their heavenly reward together with us, thanks to what Christ achieved through his Cross and Resurrection.

If we stop for a moment in our busy life, and think about the Martyrs and about the Saviour, we realise how strange our faith must seem to unbelievers.

People who died thousands of years ago under appalling torture are said to be not only alive now, but enjoying a happiness and fulfilment in heaven, such as is unimaginable here on earth.

And their victory over suffering and death is due to the fact that God himself chose to become a human being, lived on earth in a remote small country, known to hardly anyone in other parts of the world.

And God has become the Saviour of the entire human race by being nailed, naked, on a cross, like a slave, dying under the derision and insults of an on looking mob.

Why did God save the world from violence, sin and death by allowing himself to be despised, rejected, then left to die on a cross among condemned criminals? God, on our behalf, had to drain out of our human nature the pride, the thirst for status and success, so as to transform our human nature and make us all share his humility, forgiveness and love.

Christ's demand that we take up the Cross as he did is beyond the strength of nearly everyone.

We need to begin by looking at His Cross, and become fully aware that on Easter day, he really did rise in glory, share food with his disciples, and send his Holy Spirit on his Church so that we would have faith in him, do his will on earth, and become in reality children of God.

In a society which has by and large turned its back on religion, we are ststrengthened in our faith by the great crowd of witnesses: the countless people who died as martyrs and are now glorified in heaven.
The majority of Christian martyrs did not suffer only under the Roman Empire in the early centuries, but even up until very recently, in the twentieth century, under the Soviet as well as the Nazi oppressions.
In 1935, in Karaganda (at the centre of Kazakhstan), in just one camp of the Gulag, half a million people died in one year, not all, but still many, for their Christian faith.
The memory of their suffering, as that of Christ's Passion, does not incite us to hatred of the perpetrators, but trust in God's power to grant eternal life, and forgiveness to all sinners.
May God fill us with the joy of faith, and the determination to be at all times opopenly followers of Christ.
Amen.

Day 12-Jun-2023 Monday

Apostles fast begins, Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Our Holy Fathers Onuphrios the Great and Peter of Mount Athos

They lived in different times and places, but are commemorated together.

Saint Onuphrios the Great (400). "This holy ascetic had been living a whole sixty years in the desert when the monk Paphnutius visited him. His hair and beard reached down to the ground, and long hair, as white as snow, had grown all overy his body during his years of nakedness. His appearance was cadaverous, unearthly and awe-inspiring. Seeing Paphnutius, he called him by name and then recounted to him his life in the desert. His guardian angel had appeared to him and taken him to that place. He had for a long time only eaten earth, which was hard to find in the desert, and, after that, when he had survived an intensive struggle with diabolical temptations and when his heart had become utterly established in love for God, an angel had brought him bread to eat. And besides that, through God's gracious providence, a palm tree grew up at one side of his cell, that gave good dates, and a spring of water began to flow there. 'But especially,' said Onuphrios, 'my food and drink are the sweet words of God.' To Paphnutius' question about his receiving of Communion, the hermit answered that the angel of God brought him Communion every Saturday. On the next day, the old man told Paphnutius that it was the day of his departure from this world; then he knelt down, prayed to God and gave his spirit into God's hands. Then Paphnutius saw a heavenly light that illumined the body of the departed saint, and heard a choir of angelic hosts. He buried Onuphrios' body with honour and returned to his own monastery, there as a living witness to narrate to the brethren, for their edification, the wonderful life of the man of God and the greatness of God's providence towards those who give themselves wholly to His service." (Prologue)

The Great Horologion adds that Paphnutius intended to stay in the place where Onuphrios died, but soon the palm tree withered and the spring dried up, which Paphnutius took as a sign that he was meant to leave that place and return to live with the brethren.

Saint Peter of Mt Athos (734).

He was born to a noble family in Constantinople and became a soldier. He was taken captive by the Saracens and thrown into prison in chains, in Samarra of Syria. He spent his long imprisonment praying to God to free him and send him to some deserted place where he could devote the rest of his life to ascesis and prayer. One day St Nicholas appeared to him along with St Simeon the God-receiver; when they touched his chains they melted like wax, and Peter instantly found himself outside Samarra. He set out for Rome, where he was tonsured as a monk by the Pope, then set out by ship to return home. During the voyage, the Mother of God appeared to him along with St Nicholas, and Peter heard her tell St Nicholas that she had set Mt Athos apart for Peter to live in solitude. Peter had never heard of Mt Athos, but disembarked there and settled in a cave. There he spent fifty-three years in complete solitude, praying and struggling with the harshness of the elements and the attacks of demonic powers. After he had withstood fierce temptations for awhile, an angel of God began to bring him bread every forty days. Like St Onuphrios, his humble life might have passed completely unrecorded; but by God's providence, one year before the Saint's death a deer-hunter found him and heard the tale of Peter's life, which he recorded. Saint Peter reposed in peace; his relics were taken to Macedonia.

Venerable Timothy the Egyptian Hermit

Day 12-Jun-2023 Monday

Apostles fast begins, Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Romans 2:28-3:18; Matthew 6:31-34; 7:9-11
28 For one is not a Jew by being so outwardly, neither is that circumcision [true circumcision] which is outward in the flesh.
29 Instead, someone is a Jew by being one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter.
Truly, their praise is not from human beings but from God 3 And so, what advantage does the Jew have? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? 2 Much in every way! First of all, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God! 3But what if some were without faith? Will their lack of faith nullify the faithfulness of God? 4May it never be! Yes, let God be found true, but every man a liar.
As it is written, That you might be justified in your words,c and might prevail when you come into judgment.
5 But if our unrighteousness commends the righteousness of God, what will we say? Is God unrighteous if he inflicts wrath? (I speak as people do!) 6 May it never be! For then, how will God judge the world? 7 For if through my lie the truth of God overflowed to his [own] glory, why am I still judged as a sinner? 8 Why not (as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say), 'Let us do evil, so that good may come?' Those who say so are justly condemned.
9 What then? Are we better than they? No, by no means! For we previously warned both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.
10 As it is written, There is no one righteous; no, not one.
There is no one who understands.
There is no one who seeks after God.
They have all turned aside.
They have together become worthless.
There is no one who does good, no, not so much as one.
Their throat is an open grave, With their tongues they have used deceit.
The poison of vipers is under their lips; Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.
Their feet are swift to shed blood.
Destruction and misery are in their ways.
The way of peace, they have not known.
There is no fear of God before their eyes.

Gospel Reading:

31 Therefore, do not be anxious, saying: 'What will we eat?,' 'What will we drink?' or, 'What will we wear?' 32 It is the Gentiles who seek after all these things, but your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.
33 Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.
34 Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.
9 Who is there among you, who, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, who will give him a snake? 11 If you then who are evil [still] know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

Day 13-Jun-2023 Tuesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Martyr Aquilina of Byblos (293)

She was born of Christian parents, and by the age of seven was already living as a true Christian. She boldly preached Christ to the maidens with whom she played, and for this was brought before the governor during the persecutions of Diocletian. Despite her young age she would not deny Christ to save her life. After horrible tortures, she was left for dead and thrown on a dungheap. But that night an angel appeared to her saying 'Arise and be healed!' Aquilina arose fully restored and praising God; but she begged not to be denied a martyr's death. She heard a voice from heaven saying 'Go, and it shall be to thee as thou desirest.' She returned to the city and to the governor's palace by night, doors opening miraculously before her, and stood before the governor's own bed. Needless to say, the governor was seized with terror upon waking to see the maiden he had thought dead. The next morning, she was beheaded. Her relics healed many of the sick. At the time of her repose, she was only ten or twelve years old.

Saint Triphyllius, bishop of Leucosia (Nicosia) in Cyprus (370)

He was a disciple of St Spyridon (December 12), and like St Spyridon he became a bishop on Cyprus. Known for his mercy, purity, and ascetical way of life, he was called 'a living fountain of tears.' After shepherding his flock well for many years, he reposed in peace.

St Anna and her son John (5h c.)

"Taken as an orphan into the house of a nobleman and treated as an adopted child, she was cared for and educated in that house. The rich man considered her worthy to be married to his son. When the old man died, the family urged the son to put his wife away because of her low birth and to marry another more suited to his rank and wealth. The rich man's son feared God and did not want to do this. Seeing her husband in difficulties with his family, Anna secretly left him and ran off to a distant island where there was not a living soul. She was pregnant, and soon gave birth to a son. They laboured on the island for thirty years in fasting and prayer. Then, by divine providence, a hieromonk landed on the island. He baptised her son and named him John. Anna lived her ascetic life in the fifth century, and died peacefully." (Prologue)

Day 13-Jun-2023 Tuesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Readings of the day: Romans 4:4-12; Matthew 7:15-21

4 Now, to the one who works, the reward is not considered as a grace but as
something owed.
5 But to one who does not work but believes in the one who justifies the ungodly, it
is faith that is accounted for righteousness.
6 Even as David also pronounces blessing on the man to whom God attributes
righteousness apart from works: 7 Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven,
whose sins are covered.
8 Blessed is the man whom the Lord will by no means charge with sin.
9 Is this blessing then pronounced on the circumcised {only}, or on the
uncircumcised as well? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham as
righteousness.
10 How then was faith taken into account? Was it before or after he had been
circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised! 11 He received the
sign of circumcision, (a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while he
was still uncircumcised), so that he might be the father of all those who believe,
even if they are uncircumcised, so that righteousness might also be accounted to
them.
12 He is the father of circumcision not only to those who are of the circumcision
but [also to those] who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham,
which he had before he was circumcised.

Gospel Reading:

15 Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing.
Inwardly, they are ravenous wolves! 16 You will recognize them by their fruits.
Do you gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? 17 Likewise, every good
tree produces good fruit, but the corrupt tree produces evil fruit.
18 A good tree cannot produce evil fruit, and neither can a corrupt tree produce
good fruit.
19 Every tree that does not grow good fruit is cut down, and thrown into the fire.
20 Therefore, by their fruits you will recognize them.
21 It is not everyone who tells me, 'Lord, Lord' who will enter into the Kingdom of
Heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Day 14-Jun-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Prophet Elisha (Elisseus) (10th c. BC)

The disciple and spiritual heir of the Prophet Elijah (July 20), his story can be found in II Kings. Unlike most of the
Old Testament prophets, he was granted the gift of working many miracles. He reposed in peace at a great age. The Fathers tell us that he was anointed by Elijah in the year 908 BC and reposed in peace at a great age in 839 BC. He was buried in Samaria. Even after his death, miracles of wonderworking were performed through his relics.

St Methodios, Patriarch of Constantinople (847)

He was born to wealthy parents in Syracuse of Sicily. He entered monastic life and in time became a priest in the service of Patriarch Nikephoros. Because of his great and well-known zeal for the holy icons, he was cruelly persecuted by a succession of iconoclast emperors. Around 815, he was sent as an ambassador to Rome on behalf of the Patriarch, who had been exiled by the Emperor Leo the Armenian. When he returned to Constantinople upon Leo's death, he was immediately exiled and imprisoned by Leo's successor, Michael the Stutterer. Upon Michael's death he was freed for a short time, but soon the Emperor Theophilus had him exiled to an island where, says the Prologue, "he spent seven years in prison with two common robbers, in damp conditions, without light and without sufficient food, as if in a grave." When the pious Empress Theodora restored the Empire to Orthodoxy, he was freed and elevated to Patriarch of Constantinople. On the Sunday of Orthodoxy, we commemorate the restoration of the Holy Icons by Theodora and Methodios.

Despite many attacks by heretics while he was Patriarch, he served faithfully and reposed in peace.

St John Mavropos, Metropolitan of Euchaïta(1100)

He is commemorated today on the Slavic Calendar; for his life, see October 5, his commemoration on the Greek Calendar.

Day 14-Jun-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Romans 4:13-25; Matthew 7:21-23
13 Indeed, the promise to Abraham and to his seed that he should be heir of the world was not through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.
14 However, if those who are of the law are heirs, then faith is made void, and the promise is made of no effect.
15 As it is, the law brings about wrath; but where there is no law there is no transgression either.
16 This is why the promise is to faith, so that it comes as a free gift and it is secure for all the descendants, not only for those who rely on the law but also for all those others who rely on the faith of Abraham, the father of us all.
17 As it is written, 'I have made you a father of many nations.
b This is in the presence of the one whom Abraham believed: even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence what does not yet exist.
18 Hoping against hope, Abraham believed that he would become 'the father of many nations,' according to what had been spoken, 'And so will your seed be.
19 He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body which was already worn out, (he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb.
20 Yet, looking to the promise of God, he did not waver through unbelief but grew strong through faith, giving glory to God.
21 Abraham was fully convinced that what God had promised, he was also able to accomplish.
22 Therefore, it also was 'credited to him for righteousness.
23 Now, it was not written that 'it was accounted to him' for his sake alone.
24 It was [written] also for our sake; [and] faith will be credited to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.
25 He was delivered up for our sins, and was raised for our justification.

Gospel Reading:
21 It is not everyone who tells me, 'Lord, Lord' who will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.
22 Many will tell me in that Day, 'Lord, Lord, did not we prophesy in your Name, cast out demons in your Name and do many deeds of power in your Name?'

23 Then I will tell them, 'I never knew you! Depart from me, you who do what is wicked.

Day 15-Jun-2023 Thursday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Prophet Amos (8th c. BC)

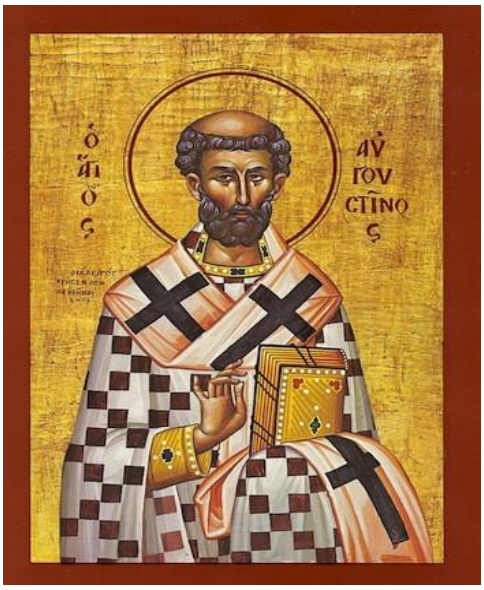
He was an unlearned shepherd from the village of Tekoa in Zabulon, near Bethlehem. His prophecies, made during the reign of King Uzziah, make up the
Old Testament book which bears his name. He is ranked third among the "minor prophets" of the Old Testament.

Holy Martyr Vitus, with Modestus and Crescentia (303)

"St Vitus was born in Sicily of eminent pagan parents. Modestus was his tutor and Crescentia his governess. St Vitus was baptised early and, when only twelve years old, began to live an intensive ascetic life. Angels appeared to him, instructing him and encouraging him in his labours, and he was himself as radiant and handsome as an angel of God. A judge who beat him had the flesh of his arm wither away, but Vitus healed it by his prayers. His father was blinded when he saw twelve angels in his room 'with eyes like stars and faces like lightning', but Vitus restored his sight by his prayers. When his father sought to kill him, an angel appeared to him and took him to Lucania on the bank of the river Silaris, together with Modestus and Crescentia. St Vitus performed many miracles there for the sick and insane. He went to Rome at the summons of the Emperor Diocletian and drove out an evil spirit from his son. Far from rewarding him, the Emperor tortured him cruelly when he would not bow down before mute idols, but the Lord delivered him from torture and returned him to Lucania by His invisible arm, and there he and Modestus and Crescentia entered into rest in the Lord. St Vitus' relics are preserved in Prague." (Prologue)

In the West, St Vitus' aid is often invoked for the cure of many ailments, especially insanity and demonic possession. For this reason his name is given to St Vitus' dance, an acute neurological illness that produces uncontrollable movements in the face and limbs, usually occurring in children.

Blessed Augustine, bishop of Hippo (430), and his mother Monica (387)



After seeking truth among many religious schools, including the Manicheans, Augustine was turned to faith in Christ through the cousel and fervent prayers of his mother St Monica. The story of his early life and conversion is beautifully told in his Confessions. He lived for seventy-six years, the last thirty-five as bishop of Hippo in north Africa. He died in a barbarian attack on that city.

In recent years, a few Orthodox writers have tried to deny that Augustine is a Saint of the Orthodox church (mostly due to some theological errors in his writings which have been unduly promoted in the Latin church). These claims are false: from the time of his canonization, he has been commemorated as a Saint.

Holy Martyr Lazar, Prince of Serbia (1389)

"He was one of the greatest men of Serbia who ruled the kingdom after king Dušan. Upon the death of King Uroš, Lazar was crowned King of Serbia by Patriarch Ephraim. He sent a delegation to Constantinople, including a monk called Isaiah, to plead for the removing of the anathema from the Serbian people. He went to war on several occasions against the Turkish Pasha, finally clashing with the Turkish king, Amurât, at Kosovo on June 15, 1389, being slain there. His body was taken to Ravanica near Cupria, a foundation of his, and buried there, but was later taken to New Ravanica in Srem. During the Second World War, in 1942, it was taken to Belgrade and placed in the Cathedral, where it is preserved to this day and offers comfort and healing to all who turn to him in prayer. He restored Hilandar and Gornjak, built Ravanica and the Lazarica in Kruševac and was the founder of St Panteleimon, the Russian monastery on the Holy Mountain, as well as numerous other churches and monasteries." (Prologue)

Venerable Martyr Dulas

Day 15-Jun-2023 Thursday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Romans 5:10-16; Matthew 8:23-27
10 For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, how much more shall we be saved by his life! 11 And not only this, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.
Sin and death – God's gift through Christ 12 Therefore, as sin entered into the world through one man, and death through sin; and so death passed to everyone, because {of which} all sinned.
13 Until the law {was revealed}, sin was in the world; but sin is not taken into account when there is no law.
14 Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those whose sins were not like Adam's disobedience (and Adam is a type of him who was to come).
15 However, the free gift is not like the sin.
For if by the sin of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one man Jesus Christ abound to the many! 16 The gift is not comparable to what happened through [the] one who sinned: certainly, the judgment came by one [man] to [result in] condemnation, but the free gift came [as the outcome] of many trespasses to [bring about] justification.

Gospel Reading:

23 When he got into a boat, his disciples followed him.
24 Behold, a violent storm came up on the sea, so much that the waves swept over the boat, but Jesus was asleep.
25 They came to him and woke him up, saying, 'Save us, Lord! We are dying!' 26 He said to them, 'Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?' Then he stood up, rebuked the wind and the sea, and there was a great calm.
27 The men marveled, saying, 'What kind of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'

Day 16-Jun-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

St Tikhon (Tychon), bishop of Amathus in Cyprus (425)

He was born to pious Christian parents on Cyprus. Known for his piety and purity of life, he was became a clergyman, then was made Bishop of Amathus by St Epiphanios (May 12). He served faithfully as bishop in Cyprus for many years, finally reposing in peace. At this time there were still many pagans in Cyprus, and he worked tirelessly as a missionary among them, bringing many to the Faith. He was known as a wonder-worker from his youth. "His father was a baker, and whenever his father left him alone in the shop, he would distribute the bread to the poor without payment. His father reproached him once for doing this, so he prayed to God and their storehouse became so full of grain that they could open the door only with difficulty." (Prologue) Once he planted a dry slip from a grapevine, and it miraculously turned green and bore fruit. After his repose, on his feast day the vine would be laden with unripe grapes, as usual for this time of year; but during the Divine Liturgy, the grapes would become fully ripened.

Holy Martyrs Tigrios and Eutropios (404)

When St John Chrysostom was exiled, the Great Church caught fire and was destroyed. Most of the people saw this as a judgment upon the City for exiling the holy Archbishop; but St John's enemies tried to blame his followers and persecuted them fiercely. Two of these loyal followers were Tigrios, a priest, and Eutropios, a reader. Tigrios had been a slave in his youth and was a eunuch; but once he was freed he had given his life selflessly to the service of the Church. The governor, Optatius, had Tigrios viciously tortured, then sent him into exile in Mesopotamia, where he died in captivity. Eutropios, another pure and holy servant of the Church, was flogged with whips and rods, then hanged. Christians carrying his body for burial heard a beautiful angelic chanting in the sky above them.

40 Martyrs of Rome

Day 16-Jun-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Readings of the day: Romans 5:17-6:2; Matthew 9:14-17

17 For if by the sin of the one, death reigned through that one; so much more will
those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in
life through the one, Jesus Christ.
18 And so, as through one sin all men were condemned; likewise through one act
of righteousness all men were justified to life.
19 Indeed, just as through the one man's disobedience many were made sinners,
likewise, through the obedience of the one, many will be made righteous.
20 Moreover, the law came in so that sin might be multiplied; but where sin did
multiply, grace multiplied even more! 21This way, just as sin ruled in death, grace
was to rule through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.
6 What then shall we say? Shall we continue in sin, so that grace may abound?
2May it never be! We who died to sin, how could we live in it any longer?

Gospel Reading

14 Then, John's disciples came to Jesus, asking, 'Why do we and the Pharisees
fast often, but your disciples do not fast?' 15 Jesus said to them, 'Can the friends
of the bridegroom mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will
come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then, they will fast.
16 No one puts a piece of new cloth on an old garment because the patch would
[shrink and] tear away from the garment, and a worse hole would be made.
17 Neither do people put new wine into old wineskins, or else the skins would
burst, and the wine be spilled, and the skins ruined.
No, they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved.

Day 17-Jun-2023 Saturday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Martyrs Manuel, Sabael, and Ismael of Persia (362)

"The holy Martyrs Manuel, Sabel, and Ishmael, Persians by race and brethren according to the flesh, were sent by the Persian King as ambassadors to Julian the Apostate to negotiate a peace treaty. While with him at a place near Chalcedon, they refused to join him in offering sacrifice to his idols. Scorning the immunity universally accorded ambassadors, he had them slain in the year 362. This was a cause of the war with Persia in which Julian perished miserably the following year." (Great Horologion)

Our Holy Father Botolph, Abbot of the Monastery of Ikanhoe (680)

'Saint Botolph was born in Britain about the year 610 and in his youth became a monk in Gaul. The sisters of Ethelmund, King of East Anglia, who were also sent to Gaul to learn the monastic discipline, met Saint Botolph, and learning of his intention to return to Britain, bade their brother the King grant him land on which to found a monastery. Hearing the King's offer, Saint Botolph asked for land not already in any man's possession, not wishing that his gain should come through another's loss, and chose a certain desolate place called Ikanhoe. At his coming, the demons inhabiting Ikanhoe rose up against him with tumult, threats, and horrible apparitions, but the Saint drove them away with the sign of the Cross and his prayer. Through his monastery he established in England the rule of monastic life that he had learned in Gaul. He worked signs and wonders, had the gift of prophecy, and "was distinguished for his sweetness of disposition and affability." In the last years of his life he bore a certain painful sickness with great patience, giving thanks like Job and continuing to instruct his spiritual children in the rules of the monastic life. He fell asleep in peace about the year 680. His relics were later found incorrupt, and giving off a sweet fragrance. The place where he founded his monastery came to be called "Botolphson" (from either "Botolph's stone" or "Botolph's town") which was later contracted to "Boston."' (Great Horologion)

Holy Martyr Isaurus and Companions

Day 17-Jun-2023 Saturday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.
Readings of the day: Romans 3:19-26; Matthew 7:1-8
19 Now, we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be closed, and so that the whole world may be brought under the judgment of God.
20 The reason is that by the works of the law, no flesh will be justified in his sight because the exact knowledge of sin comes through the law.
21 But now, a righteousness of God has been revealed apart from the law; and the law and the prophets bear witness to it.
22 It is the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all those who believe.
23 There is no distinction because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.
24 All are being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.
25 God purposed him to be an atoning sacrifice through the shedding of his blood and to be received through faith.
This was to demonstrate his righteousness by passing over prior sins, according to God's patience.
26 This was also to demonstrate his righteousness at this present time, so that God might himself be just and the justifier of whoever has faith in Jesus.

Gospel Reading:

7 Do not judge in order not to be judged.
2 For in the same way that you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure that you use, it will be measured to you.
3 Why do you see the speck that is in someone else's eye but do not consider the beam that is in your own eye? 4 How can you tell someone,c 'Let me remove the speck from your eye;' and behold, there is a beam in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite! First, remove the beam out of your own eye, and then you will be able to see clearly [so as] to remove the speck out of your brother's eye.
6 Do not give what is holy to the dogs and do not throw your pearls before pigs, for fear that they might trample them under their feet, and then turn [against you] and tear you to pieces.
7 Ask, and it will be given you! Seek, and you will find! Knock, and it will be opened

for you! 8 Indeed, everyone who asks receives.
Whoever seeks finds! To the one who knocks, it will be opened.

Day 18-Jun-2023 Sunday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Martyr Leontius, and with him Martyrs Hypatius and Theodoulos, at Tripoli in Syria (73)

An honored Roman commander in Tripoli of Phoenicia, he was described as being 'of great physical stature, powerful, strong and bold in battle'. When it was learned that he was a Christian and had given grain to the poor from the imperial storehouse, the governor Hadrian, a great persecutor of Christians, sent Hypatius, a military commander, and Theodoulus, a soldier, along with some others to arrest him. On the way Hypatius fell gravely ill with a fever, and the company had to delay its mission. One night an angel of the Lord appeared to Hypatius and said, 'If you desire to be healed, you and your soldiers must cry to heaven three times: "O God of Leontius, help me!"'. Hypatius told his comrades of his vision, and when they all cried out as instructed Hypatius was instantly healed. Hypatius and Theodoulos then went on ahead of the other soldiers and found Leontius. Leontius received them hospitably and offered them refreshment. As they rested in his house, he proclaimed his faith in Christ and their hearts began to burn within them. While Leontius was still speaking, a bright cloud descended upon the two soldiers and shed dew on them while Leontius said 'In the name of the All-holy Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.' Thus were they baptized by the Holy Spirit Himself.

When the cruel Hadrian discovered this, he had the two soldiers beaten fiercely, then beheaded; he then subjected Leontius to the cruelest tortures, under which he finally died, unwavering in his faith. This was during the reign of Vespasian.

Venerable Leontius the Clairvoyant

Day 18-Jun-2023 Sunday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Sunday of Fishers of Men
Romans 2:10-16; Matthew 4:18-23

10 On the other hand, glory, honor, and peace [are] for everyone who does good;
to the Jew first, and also to the Greek, 11 because there is no partiality with God.
12 Hence, all those who have sinned apart from the law will also perish without the
law, [and] as many as have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.
13 For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers
of the law will be declared righteous.
14 (Indeed, when Gentiles who do not have the law do by nature the things of the
law, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law, 15 by
showing that the practical expression of the law is written in their hearts.
Their conscience bears witness, and their thoughts alternately accuse or defend
them).
16 This is for the day when, according to my [proclamation of the] gospel, God,
through Jesus Christ, will judge the secret thoughts of all.

Gospel Reading: Second Sunday after Pentecost: Sunday of Fishers of Men
Matthew 4:18-23

18 Walking by the sea of Galilee, Jesus saw two brothers: Simon who is called
Peter, and Andrew his brother.
They were casting a net into the sea since they were fishermen.
19 He said to them, 'Come after me, and I will make you fish for people!' 20
Immediately, they left their nets and followed him.
21 Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee,
and John his brother.
They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets.
Jesus called them.
22 At once, they left the boat and their father, and followed him.
23 Jesus traveled throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the
Good News of the Kingdom, and healing all kinds of diseases and sickness among
the people.

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING

Dear brethren, I would like to share a few thoughts with you about one of the most frequently used and most important words in our vocabulary.
I am speaking about the word love.
It is a word we all use.
It is something we all desire to be the object of.
Love is a word the Church uses continuously.
But it is the same word that is used by the world, in songs, in poems and in other expressions of the human spirit.
The question is, whilst we may be using the same word, do we use it with the same meaning? The Fathers of our Church were not primarily concerned with words but with their content.
When the Fathers would engage in dogmatical dispute, it was never solely over words, but over their meaning.
My impression is that though the world and the Church both speak about love their meaning not only differs, but is diametrically opposed.
The one is sheer selfishness, whilst the other is utterly selfless.
When the world says I love this or that person, this or that group, type of food etc., it is simply expressing what it likes, what 'I' like and what makes 'me' feel happy.
It is, therefore, basically selfish and egotistic.
But when the Church invites us to love, it is not telling us to do what we like, but what the other likes, or rather what the other needs.
Worldly love is selfish, whilst Gospel love is selfless.
The world tells us to think of 'number one'.
That is not completely true.
Yes, think of number one; that is correct.
But who is number one? The deceitful world will say you are, while the Church will say, no, God and your brother is.
There are three categories of person that we can love: ourselves, our neighbour (other people) and God.
Just as in the parable of the talents, where a man called his servants and distributed his goods, so does God distribute to us a certain capital, a certain amount of love.
We, just as those servants were, are entirely free to barter with this capital of love as we see fit.
The world invites us selfishly to keep all this capital for ourselves, to love ourselves and no one else, unless they serve our self-interest.
Contrariwise, the Church invites us to put ourselves to the side and to invest all our

love in God and in our neighbour.
That is how we make the capital of love grow and bear fruit, by giving it to the other.
He who selfishly keeps this love for himself can be likened to a battery which instead of externalizing its energy, greedily keeps it for itself and ends up self-eroding and self-destructing.
This is how one contemporary saint described depression.
When you keep all your love for yourself, you end up destroying yourself.
Therefore, brethren, let us thank God for the capital of love He has freely and generously bestowed upon us.
Let us barter wisely, for example, the Gospel tells us to repay evil with good.
Let us be shrewd merchants.
Let us not be another Scrooge with our love, thinking just of ourselves.
But let us put God first in our lives - and out of love for God - let us love our neighbour as He commands us and as Christ has shown us.
And when the day of judgement comes, may we hear, to our humble astonishment, the Lord welcoming us into His Kingdom.

Day 19-Jun-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Apostle Jude, the Brother of the Lord (80)

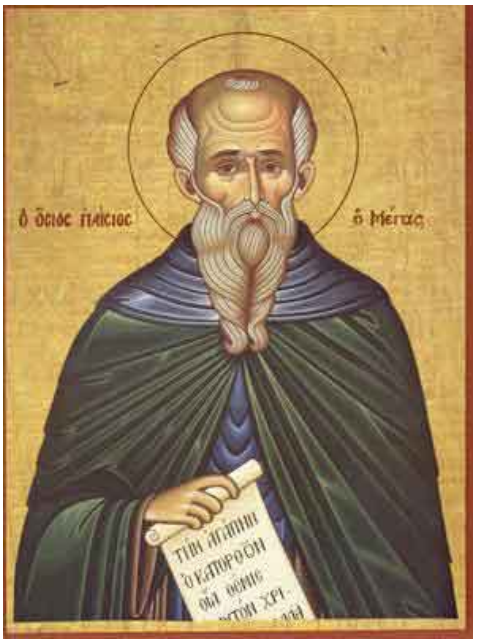
St. Jude was one of the Twelve Apostles. He was the son of Joseph and Salome (not the Salome of Bethlehem, not another) and the brother of James, the brother of the Lord. Joseph the carpenter had four sons with Salome: James, Hosea, Simon and Jude. This Jude is sometimes called 'Jude, the brother of James" due to his brother being better-known (Luke 6:16, Acts 1:13). St. Jude begins his epistle in this manner: *Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James* (Jude 1:1). Even though he could call himself the brother of the Lord as much as James, he did not do this, out of humility and shame, for he did not at first believe in Christ the Lord. When the elderly Joseph, before his death, wanted to leave a portion of his estate to Jesus, as well as to his other children, all of them protested, even Jude. Only James voluntarily set aside a share of his portion and intended it for Jesus. Jude is also called Levi and Thaddaeus. There is another Thaddaeus of the Seventy Apostles (August 21), but this Thaddaeus or Jude was one of the Great Apostles. Jude preached the Gospel throughout Judea, Samaria, Galilee, Idumea, Syria, Arabia, Mesopotamia and Armenia. In Edessa, the town of Abgar, he augmented the preaching of the other Thaddaeus. When Jude was preaching in the regions around Ararat, he was captured by pagans, crucified on a cross and killed by being shot with arrows, that he might reign eternally in the Kingdom of Christ.

Source: St. Nikolai Velimirovic, The Prologue of Ohrid – Volume One.

Apolytikion

We know thee as a kinsman of Christ and we laud thee with sacred hymns and songs as a most steadfast Martyr who trampled on error and who courageously kept the Faith. As we celebrate today thy holy remembrance, we receive forgiveness of our sins and transgressions, O Jude, through thy holy prayers.

Our Holy Father Païsius the Great of Egypt (400)



He was born in Egypt around the year 300. After receiving a vision in a dream, his mother consecrated him to God as a monk, and he became a disciple of Abba Pambo (July 18) when scarcely more than a child. He was a fellow-disciple with St John the Dwarf (November 9), who later wrote his life. Païsius excelled in ascetical labors, and was granted many revelations. Once the Prophet Jeremiah, whom he especially venerated, appeared to him. At another time the Lord himself appeared to him with two Angels, and allowed Païsius to wash His feet. He was granted a special gift of being able to live without food: He often went without food for two weeks, and once, according to St John the Dwarf, for seventy days. He underwent terrible struggles with the demons, who sometimes appeared to him in horrible forms and sometimes as angels of light. He was once asked what virtue is the highest of all, and answered "That which is done in secret." He reposed in peace at a great age. His relics can still be venerated at the monastery of Amba Bishoy in Wadi Natrun in Egypt, where they still work healings and other miracles.

Holy Myrrh-bearer Mary, mother of the Apostle James (1st c.).
Holy Martyr Zosimas
Venerable John the Solitary

Day 19-Jun-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Readings of the day: Romans 7:1-13; Matthew 9:36-10:8

Do you not know, brethren (for I speak to men who know the law), that the law has dominion over a person for as long as that person lives? 2 Hence, the woman who has a husband is bound by law to the husband while he lives, but if the husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband.
3 Therefore, if she is joined to another man while her husband lives, she would be called an adulteress.
But if the husband dies, she is free from the law and she is no adulteress even though she is now joined to another man.
4 Therefore, my brethren, you also were made dead to the law through the body of Christ in order to be joined to another, to him who was raised from the dead, so that we might bring forth fruit to God.
5 While we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were through the law worked in our members to produce fruit unto death.
6 But now, we have been released from the {obligations of the} law, having died to what was binding us, so that we serve in 'newness of the spirit,' and not in 'oldness of the letter.
7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? May it never be! However, I would not have recognized sin, except through the law.
Indeed, I would not have known coveting, unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet.
8 But sin, finding an opportunity in the commandment, produced in me all kinds of coveting! For apart from the law, sin is dead.
9 I was alive apart from the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.
10 The commandment which was [meant] for life, I found to be for death, 11 because sin, finding an opportunity through the commandment deceived me, and through it, killed me.
12 Therefore, the law indeed is holy, and the commandment is [also] holy, and righteous, and good.
13 Does that mean that something good ({the law})a resulted in death to me? May it never be! However, in order to be identified as sin, sin caused my death through that good thing.
Hence, it is by means of the commandment that sin could become sinful beyond what anyone can bear.

Gospel Reading:
36 But when he saw the crowds, he was moved with compassion for them
because they were distressed and scattered, like sheep without a shepherd.
37 He then said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful indeed, but the workers
are few! 38 Pray therefore that the Lord of the harvest will send out workers into
his harvest.
10 The commission of the Twelve Jesus called to himself his twelve disciples and
gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind
of disease and sickness.
2 The names of the Twelve apostles are: first, Simon, who is called Peter; Andrew,
his brother; James the son of Zebedee; John, his brother; 3 Philip; Bartholomew;
Thomas; Matthew the tax collector; James [the son] of Alphaeus; Lebbaeus, the
one called Thaddaeus; 4 Simon the Canaanite;d and Judas Iscariot, who also
betrayed him.
5 Jesus sent these Twelve out and gave them this instruction, 'Do not go among
the Gentiles and do not enter into any city of the Samaritans.
6 Rather, go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.
7 As you go, preach and say: 'The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!' 8 Heal the sick,
cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out demons.
Freely you have received, give freely as well.

Day 20-Jun-2023 Tuesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Hieromartyr Methodius, bishop of Patara/Olympia (312)

Noted in his own time for his wisdom and virtue, he was called Eubolos, meaning "of good counsel." He was among the first to oppose the heretical writings of Origen. He was bishop in Patara (according to some sources) or Olympia (according to others), then of Tyre in Phoenecia. Under the Emperor Maximinus, he was attacked by the pagans and received the crown of martyrdom in Chalkis in Greece.

St Kallistos I, Patriarch of Constantinople (1363)

For twenty-eight years he lived the ascetical life on Mt Athos as a disciple of St Gregory of Mt Sinai. Later, he founded the monastery of St Mamas, also on Mt Athos. In 1350 he was elected Patriarch of Constantinople. After four years, he resigned the patriarchal throne to return to the Holy Mountain, but was called back to the throne, where he remained until his death in 1363. He wrote the definitive lives of St Gregory the Sinaite and St Theodosius of Trnovo. He was known to St Maximos Kapsokalyvia (the Hut-burner), who foretold his death: On his final journey to Serbia, on which he died, the Patriarch stopped on Mt Athos, where St Maximos saw him and said, "This elder will not see his flock again, because I hear behind him the hymn over the grave, 'Blessed are those that are undefiled in the way...'"

Blessed Studios (5th c.)

He was a prominent nobleman and consul in Constantinople. In the City he founded both the Church of St John the Forerunner in 463, and the monastery thereafter called the Studion in honor of him. The Studion monastery nurtured a long line of ascetics, teachers, and martyrs; perhaps the best known is St Theodore the Studite (November 11), the great defender of the holy icons. The monastery was destroyed by the Crusaders in 1204, restored in 1293 by Emperor Andronicus II.

Saint Leucius, Bishop of Brindisi

Day 20-Jun-2023 Tuesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Romans 7:14-8:2; Matthew 10:9-15
14 For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.
15 Indeed, I do not know what I am doing! I do not practice what I desire to do; but what I hate, this is what I do! 16 But if I do what I do not desire, I agree that the law is good.
17 And so, I am no longer the one doing this [evil], but [it is] the sin which dwells in me! 18 Thus, I know that in me, (that is, in my flesh,) nothing good dwells, because although [the power of] will is present within me, I do not find it doing what is good.
19 In fact, the good which I desire, I do not do; but the evil which I do not desire, this is what I do! 20 But if I do what I do not desire, I am no longer the one doing it, but [it is] the sin which dwells in me.
21So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, it is evil that is present.
22 For I delight in God's law in my inmost self, 23 but I see a different law [working] in my members, and it is at war against the law of my mind! It brings me into captivity under the law of sin which is in my members.
24 What a wretched I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 I thank God through Jesus Christ, our Lord! And so, with the mind I serve God's law, but with the flesh, [I serve] the law of sin.
8 Free from the law of sin and of death Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.
c 2For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and of death.

Gospel Reading:
9 Do not take any gold, silver or brass in your money belts.
10 Do not take a bag for your journey, or two coats, or shoes, or staff: the one who works is worthy of his food.
11 As you enter any city or village, find out who is worthy and stay there until you go on.
12 As you enter into the household, greet it.
13 If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you.
14 If some place does not receive you and does not hear your words, shake off the

dust from your feet as you depart from that house or that city.
15 Amen, I tell you: in the day of judgment, it will be more tolerable for the land of
Sodom and Gomorrah than for that city.

Day 21-Jun-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Hieromartyr Terentios of Iconius
† Martyr Julian of Tarsus in Cilicia (305)

"Of a noble senatorial family, he lived in Tarsus in Cilicia and suffered in the reign of Diocletian. Although only eighteen years old when he was taken for trial for the Faith, St Julian was already both educated and resolute in Christian faith and devotion. The imperial governor took him from city to city for a whole year, torturing him all the while and attempting to persuade him to renounce Christ. Julian's mother followed her son at a distance. When the governor seized her and sent her to urge her son to renounce Christ, she spent three days in the prison with him, giving him precisely the opposite advice, teaching him and giving him the strength not to lose heart but to go to his death with courage and gratitude to God. His torturers then sewed Julian into a sack of sand with scorpions and snakes and threw him into the sea, and his mother also died under torture. The waves carried his body onto the shore, and the faithful took it to Alexandria, where they buried it in 290. His relics were later taken to Antioch. St John Chrysostom himself gave an eulogy for the holy martyr Julian: 'A holy voice comes forth from the lips of the martyr, and with this voice is poured out a light brighter than the rays of the sun.' He said further: 'Take whomsoever you will, be he a madman or one possessed, and lead him to the grave of this saint, to the martyr's relics, and you will see the demon immediately jump out and flee as from blazing fire.' It is evident from this speech that many wonders must have been wrought at St Julian's grave." (Prologue)

Our Holy Fathers Julius and Julian (5th c.)

They were brothers from Greece, Christians from childhood; Julius was a priest, Julian a deacon. At the command of the Emperor Theodosius the Younger, they set out as missionaries to destroy idols and bring the people to faith in Christ throughout the Empire. During their lifetime they built a hundred

churches and brought thousands to Christ. They reposed in peace near Milan: that city's people once invoked St Julius for help against wolves.

Hieromartyr Terentios of Iconius

Day 21-Jun-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Romans 8:1-13; Matthew 10:16-22
8 Free from the law of sin and of death Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.
2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and of death.
3 What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God has accomplished by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin. Thus he condemned sin in the flesh; 4 so that the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.
5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit [set their minds] on the things of the Spirit.
6 The mind of the flesh is death, but the mind of the Spirit is life and peace.
7 This is because the mind of the flesh is hostile towards God; certainly, it is not subject to God's law, and indeed it cannot be.
8 Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.
9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you.
But surely anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.
10 If Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is alive because of righteousness.
11 But if the Spirit of him who raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised up Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.
12 And so, brethren, we are not in debt to the flesh that we should live after the flesh.
13 For if you live after the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, then you will live!

Gospel Reading:
16 Behold, I send you out as sheep among wolves! Therefore, be wise as serpents, and yet innocent as doves.
17 But beware of men: they will hand you over to councils and in their synagogues, they will flog you.

18 Yes, you will be brought before governors and kings for my sake, as witnesses
to them and to the nations.
19 When they arrest you, do not worry about what you will say; what you are to
say will be given you in that hour.
20 Indeed, it is not you who [shall] speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks
in you.
21 Brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child.
Children will rise up against their parents and cause them to be put to death.
22 You will be hated by all for my Name's sake, but the one who endures to the
end will be saved.

Day 22-Jun-2023 Thursday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Hieromartyr Eusebius, bishop of Samosata (380)

In the struggle against the Arian heresy, Meletius, Patriarch of Antioch, was deposed, and the emperor Constantius demanded that Eusebius surrender the document that proved his legitimate appointment to the Patriarchal throne. Eusebius said he would not surrender it without the permission of all who had signed it and, when imperial soldiers threatened to cut off his right hand, he held out both his hands to them. When Constantius heard of this, he was struck with admiration and ceased his persecution of the bishop. As the Arian heresy continued to rage, Eusebius stood strong, and was finally exiled by order of the Emperor Valens. When the messenger bearing the edict of banishment arrived, Eusebius warned him to keep quiet lest the people, hearing why he had come, should kill him. Then Eusebius left the city on foot, under cover of darkness, in order to protect the messenger from harm. Upon the death of Valens, Eusebius returned to from exile and traveled throughout Syria (though he was now a very old man), appointing priests and bishops known for their Orthodoxy. About 380, as he was entering a village to enthrone a bishop, an Arian woman threw a tile at him from a rooftop, fracturing his skull. As he lay dying, he made all the bystanders swear not to take any revenge.

Saint Gregory the Theologian corresponded with Eusebius, and esteemed him so highly that in a letter to him he wrote, 'That such a man should deign to be my patron also in his prayers will gain for me, I am persuaded, as much strength as I should have gained through one of the holy martyrs.'

St Alban, First Martyr of Great Britain (early 3rd c.)

He was a soldier in the Roman army and, according to the venerable Bede, was brought to faith in Christ by a fugitive priest to whom he gave shelter. The saint exchanged clothes with the priest, allowing him to escape and ensuring his own martyrdom. Some writers, including St Bede, place his martyrdom during the reign of Diocletian (286-303).

Saint Alban's tomb was venerated as early as 429 by St Germanus of Auxerre. The town of Verulamium is either his home town or the place of his martyrdom; near it a monastery was founded, around which grew the English town of St Albans.

Holy Martyrs Zenon and Zenas

Day 22-Jun-2023 Thursday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Romans 8:22-27; Matthew 10:23-31
22 We know that the totality of creation groans and labors in pain until now.
23 Moreover, so do we who have the first fruits of the Spirit! We groan within ourselves, awaiting the adoption, the redemption of our body.
24 We were saved in hope, but hope that is seen is not hope! Indeed, who hopes for what can be seen? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.
26 Also, the Spirit helps our weaknesses, because we do not know how to pray as we should.
But the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.
27 He who searches the hearts knows the way of thinking of the Spirit, because the prayers that the Spirit makes for the saints are always in accordance with God.

Gospel Reading:

23 Nevertheless, when they persecute you in this city, flee into the next.
Amen, I tell you: you will not have finished going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes.
24 A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master.
25 It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher and the servant like his lord.
If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more those of his household! 26 Therefore, do not be afraid of them, for there is nothing covered that will not be revealed and nothing hidden that will not be known.
27 What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in the ear, proclaim on the housetops.
28 Do not be afraid of those who [can] kill the body but are not able to kill the soul. Rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna.
29 Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Not one of them falls on the ground apart from your Father's will, 30 but the very hairs of your head are all numbered.
31 Therefore, do not be afraid! You are of more value than many sparrows!

Day 23-Jun-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Martyr Aristocleus
Holy Martyrs Eustochius and Gaius, and those with them

Martyr Agrippina of Rome (3rd c.)

She lived in virginity in Rome during the reign of Valerian (253-260) — as the Prologue says, 'expelling the stench of the passions from her heart with the sweet-smelling perfume of purity and chastity.' She voluntarily presented herself to the pagans and announced herself to be a Christian, for which she was tortured to death. Her friends Vassa, Paula and Agathonica took her relics to Sicily for burial. A church was built there in her name, and many miracles were worked there.

Commemoration of the Vladimir Icon of the Most Holy Mother of God

Moscow was besieged by the Tartar king Ahmet. Prince Ivan Vasillievich brought troops to defend the city, but they were far outnumbered by the Tartar forces. Despairing of their hope in human protection, the people of the city pleaded for deliverance to the holy Mother of God before her icon. The Tartar forces were unaccountably struck with terror, and retreated in confusion, saving the city. On this day, the miracle, and the holy icon through which it was brought about, is commemorated in Russia.

Day 23-Jun-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Romans 9:6-19; Matthew 10:32-36; 11:1
6 But it is not as though the word of God has come to nothing.
In fact, those of 'Israel' are not all Israel, 7 and just because they are Abraham's seed, not all are children.
But, 'In Isaac will your seed be called.
8 That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are considered as descendants.
9 For this is a word of promise, 'At the appointed time I will come, and Sarah will have a son.
10 Not only so, but Rebecca also conceived by our father Isaac.
11 Even before her twins had been born or had done anything good or bad (so that God's purpose of election might stand, not of works, but of him who calls), 12 it was said to her, 'The elder will serve the younger.
13 Even as it is written, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.
14 What then shall we say? That there is injustice with God? May it never be! 15 For God said to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.
16 And so, it is not about someone willing or running, but it depends on God who has mercy.
17 Thus, the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'For this very purpose, I caused you to be raised up, so that I might show in you my power, and that my Name might be proclaimed in all the earth.
18 And so, God has mercy on whom he desires, and he hardens whom he desires.
19 You will then ask me, 'Why does God still find fault? Who can resist his will?'

Gospel Reading

32 Whoever confesses me before men I will also confess before my Father who is in heaven.
33 But whoever denies me in front of others I will also deny before my Father who is in heaven.
Not peace but the sword 34 Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth! I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.
35 Indeed, I came to set a son against his father, a daughter against her mother and a daughter-in-law against her mother-inlaw.

36 A man's enemies will be members of his own household.
When Jesus had finished giving instructions to his twelve disciples, he left that place to teach and preach in their cities.

Day 24-Jun-2023 Saturday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Nativity of St John the Baptist

The wonderful story of the Forerunner's conception and birth is told in the first chapter of the Gospel according to Luke. Together with the Most Holy Theotokos and Christ Himself, both his conception and his birth are commemorated as Feasts of the Church. His name, Johanan in Hebrew, means "The Lord is Gracious."

The Prologue adds: "The news of the angel's appearing to Zacharias, of his dumbness and of the loosening of his tongue at the exact moment that he wrote 'John', was carried throughout all Israel, coming to Herod's ears. So, when he sent men to kill all the infants around Bethlehem, he sent men off to Zacharias' family house in the hills, to slay John also. But Elisabeth hid the child in good time. The king was enraged at this, and sent an executioner to the Temple to kill Zacharias (for it was then his turn to serve in the Temple again). Zacharias was killed between the court and the Temple, and his blood clotted and solidified on the paving slabs, and remained as an enduring witness against Herod. Elisabeth hid herself and the child in a cave, where she soon died. The young John remained in the wilderness alone, in the care of God and His angels." See September 5.

Apolytikion

O Prophet and Forerunner of the presence of Christ, we who fervently honor you cannot worthily praise you. For by your revered and glorious birth the barrenness of your mother and the muteness of your father were unbound, and the incarnation of the Son of God is proclaimed to the world.

Synaxis of Sts Zacharias and Elisabeth parents of John the Baptist
Holy Martyrs Orentius, Pharnacius, Eros, Firmus, Firminus, Cyriacus and Longinus (3rd c.)

They were all brothers, soldiers together during the reign of Maximian. During a Roman campaign against the Scythians beyond the Danube, Orentius fought in single combat with Marathom, a Scythian champion like Goliath, and slew him. The Roman commander ordered a sacrifice to the idols in thanksgiving for the victory; but Orentius and his brothers declared that they were Christians and would make no such sacrifice. In a moment, the champion of the battle became a persecuted confessor: without regard for his great victory, he and his brothers were sentenced to exile. All of them died on the way, from hunger or torture.

Sermon preached by Fr. Seraphim Solof at St. Mary Orthodox Church in Central Square, Cambridge on Sunday, June 24, 2018.
Transcript as delivered:

It's the Feast of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist today being June 24th and it actually completes something that we commemorated almost nine months ago. On September 23rd we celebrated the conception of St. John the Baptist. So, nine months plus a day we celebrate the Nativity of St. John, his birth. It's interesting when we celebrate the conception of the Virgin Mary on December 9th and then she's born on September 8th, it's 9 months less a day. So, St. John the Baptist and the Virgin Mary are both off in their gestations by one day. Only Jesus is perfect So, he's conceived on the Feast of the Annunciation - March 25th - and he's born exactly nine months later on Christmas. So, there we go, a little fun fact for you.

So, St. John is in fact the bridge between the Old Testament and the New Testament. He is the last of the Old Testament prophets, and you can tell this from his appearance. He's dressed in camel's hair, and he wears a leather belt. The last one famous for dressing like that was the Prophet Elias. So when people saw him, I'm sure Elias came to mind - the prophet Elijah. In fact there are many references to John being Elijah.
Some thought he had come back from the dead. Even Jesus himself said that John was fulfilling Elijah's ministry, and that ministry was to appear before the Messiah and to make his way straight. We'll get to that in a second.

He was out in the wilderness eating locusts and wild honey - a very prophet thing to do. I could live with the wild honey, but the locusts don't sound very good. If you were at Vespers last night or read the service the Old Testament readings were fascinating, and very much in tune with the story of the Nativity and birth of St. John. The first reading last night at Vespers was when the angel or angels of the Lord - the three.
Here's the icon above the royal doors - it's called the hospitality of Abraham - it's when the three angels came and visited Abraham and Sarah at the Oaks of

Mamre and the angel told first Abraham and Sarah the Sarah was going to bear a child. Sarah was so old that she laughed, and Abraham laughed too. That's why the child is named Isaac. I don't know Hebrew but apparently that's the etymology of Isaac. They both laughed at these words of the angel.

In the same way, Zechariah, when the Archangel Gabriel gives him the news at the conception of Saint John the Baptist that he was going to have a son, he said how can this be? By that time, Gabriel was old and cranky and kind of lost his temper and said okay you don't believe me so you're gonna be mute until he have this the child and that will be the proof to you that I know what I'm doing.
He actually did the same thing with the elder Simeon and we hear the story in February: Simeon was one of the translators of the Septuagint.
Simeon's part was translating," and a virgin shall conceive and bear a child and you shall call his name Emmanuel." Simeon, as he was translating, said "how can this be?" and he started to scratch out the word virgin and Gabriel showed up and said, "no, no, you are gonna live until you see the fulfillment of this prophecy," and that's why Simeon is so bloody old by the time Mary and Joseph bring the child Jesus to the temple on the fortieth day for his birth to do the things prescribed by the law. In any case, that was the first reading last night.

The second one talks about the parents, but it doesn't talk about the Prophet who they were describing. It was the prophet Samson. You remember the story of Samson and Delilah, you couldn't cut Samson's hair and it wasn't until Delilah used her womanly wiles on him and cut his hair and he lost all his power then the Philistines were able to kill him.
What had happened or what Samson was was called a Nazarite - someone in ancient Israel who had taken special vows and especially dedicated themselves to God. And the rules of the Nazarite law were, among other things, you couldn't cut your hair, and you couldn't drink wine or strong drink.
Now, they don't mention anything in this morning's Gospel about the hairpiece, although if you see an icon of St. John the Baptist, obviously he didn't get his hair cut very often. In any case, it's very clear that the angel told Zechariah he shall have no strong drink in other words he's dedicated to God in the way of a Nazarite in the way of the Prophet Samson in the Old Testament. Finally the third reading last night was from the prophecy of Isaiah. It's kind of that the tagline of the ministry of St. John the Baptist - "a voice crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord." So we hear that passage from Isaiah last night. So through all of these things you know the appearance of John the Baptist and certainly these readings that help us prepare tell us that he's a prophet and in fact a great prophet. But a point of fact, he is the last and greatest of all the prophets.
If you think about all of the prophets in the Old Testament, they could only talk about the Messiah, the Promised One, the Anointed One of God coming far in the future. If you remember the prophecy of Balaam and he wasn't even in Israelite but

God made him prophesy. He said, I see him but but not here. I perceived him, but far away off. All of the prophets could only speak to what was way out in the distance way out in time, but not John the Baptist. What was John the Baptist's message? it's "behold, the lamb of God." He's right over there. That guy. It was that immediate. It was that real. This was it. He was the last prophet. He was completing the work of all the prophets, which was, on the one hand, proclaiming the Word of God, and on the other hand leading people to God, pointing people to God.
He was in fact so effective at this that the first disciples of Jesus were in fact disciples of John.
John said basically, no, this is the guy. Andrew the first-called and Peter, his brother, and Nathaniel, all of these first disciples of Jesus started out as disciples of John, who at John's direction went and followed the one that John had prophesied that John was pointing out now.
It's interesting John was baptizing, and he baptizes Jesus and we know about that at Theophany. But then, John is still baptizing and then Jesus shows up and Jesus starts baptizing him and the Jews went out to him and to John and they were very confused and they said, "that guy that you baptized, he's set up shop right down the road he's baptizing - what gives?"

It's very interesting. John at that point describes the fulfillment of his ministry he says, "Now my joy is complete." He says, I'm like the friend of the bridegroom, but when the bridegroom shows up, my work is done. I got him here for the wedding. He's here with his bride, and he says these words which should be guidance for all of us, and this is I think what we take away from the celebration of St. John's birth today. He says, "now he must increase and I must decrease."

So if we are to carry on the work of the prophet the work of John the Baptist who was above all the servant of God, his friend and his servant - all of us want to be the friends and the servants of God, we have to do what he did. We have to speak the Word of God and we have to point people to God and the only way that we can do that is if we let Him - Jesus - increase and us decrease.
Because, if I want to kind of keep myself going if I want to make it all about me if all my words are about me well I mean that's just it it's all about me; I'm not speaking the Word of God, I'm speaking the word of Seraphim, and who needs to listen to that? If all I'm pointing to is me you know - me me, me, me - that's very exciting for me, you know, but then I'm not doing my job which is to point people to God. So, we today as we hear these words as we remember this story and emulate the life and ministry of St. John the Baptist, have to keep this in mind. God has to increase. We have to decrease so that we can do our job, so that we can do what we are called to do.

Now, ultimately this cost St. John everything. He continued to proclaim the Word of

God and he spoke the truth and power in in a very real way, and got his head chopped off for a kind of thanks. As sad as that might sound, think about it, we're 2,000 years later celebrating his birthday. We celebrate his conception, his birth, his beheading on August 29th, and then the first, second, and third findings of his head! So, if you want to talk about a paradox, John is the one who points everyone to Jesus. He steps aside, he becomes less so that Jesus can become more. Now, he's glorified, you know, all throughout the year, all throughout the world. This is how it's done, and by the way, this is what God does for his friends. You do His will, you put Him first, you speak His word, you get out of His way, and then you're golden. So I'll leave you with that. Happy Feast Day and Happy Birthday John the Baptist!

Day 24-Jun-2023 Saturday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.
Readings of the day: Romans 3:28-4:3; Matthew 7:24-8:4
28 Therefore, we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.
29 Or is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not the God of the Gentiles as well? Indeed, [he is the God] of the Gentiles too, 30 since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by means of faith, and the uncircumcised through faith.
31 Do we then nullify the law through faith? May it never be! In fact, we upholdc the law.
4 About Abraham What then will we say that Abraham (our forefather according to the flesh) gained? 2Certainly, if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, although not before God.
3For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accountedd to him as righteousness.
e 24 Everyone therefore who hears my words and does them, I will compare to a wise person who built his house on a rock.
c 25 The rain came down, the floods came, and the winds blew, beating hard on that house.
Yet, it did not collapse, because it was founded on the rock.
26 But everyone who hears my words and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.
27 The rain came down, the floods came, and the winds blew, beating hard on that house; then it collapsed, and great was its downfall.
28 It happened, when Jesus had finished saying these things, that the crowds were astonished at his teaching 29 because he taught them with authority, not like the scribes.
8 Healing of a leper When Jesus came down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him.
2Behold, a leper came to him and expressed adoration tod him, saying, 'Lord, if you want to, you can make me clean!' 3Jesus stretched out his hand, and touched him, saying, 'I want to! Be made clean.
Immediately, this man's leprosy was cleansed.
4Jesus then said to him, 'Do not tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.

Day 25-Jun-2023 Sunday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Afterfeast of the Nativity of St John the Baptist
† Virgin-Martyr Febronia of Nisibis (310)

Though the daughter of a Roman senator and a great beauty, she fled the world and entered a monastery in Mesopotamia. (So great was her beauty that the abbess had her stand behind a screen while reading to her monastic sisters.) At that time the Emperor Diocletian sent a certain Selenus, along with his nephew Lysimachus, on a mission to find and destroy Christians in the East. Though Selenus was a fierce persecutor of the Christians, Lysimachus felt sympathy for them and secretly protected them whenever he could. Selenus and his party came to Nisibis, where Febronia's virtue and holiness had already become well-known, though she was still only twenty years old. Selenus summoned her and made every effort to convince her to renounce her faith. When she stood firm, she was first viciously dismembered then beheaded. Lysimachus gathered her relics and took them to the monastery for burial. At the monastery he, together with many soldiers, were baptized. The holy Febronia's relics worked many healings, and she herself appeared to the other nuns on the anniversary of her repose, standing in her usual place among her sisters. Her relics were translated to Constantinople in 363.

Our Holy Father Dionysios, founder of the Monastery of St John the Forerunner on Mt Athos (1380)

He was born in Koritza in Albania. His elder brother Theodosius went to the Holy Mountain and in time became abbot of the monastery of Philotheou. A few years later Dionysios followed his brother and became a monk under him at Philotheou. A heavenly light began to appear to Dionysios every night at the same place, some distance from his monastery. Believing that the light was a divine sign that he was to build a monastery, Dionysios left the Holy Mountain to seek the help of his brother (now Metropolitan of Trebizond) and the Emperor Alexios Comnenis. From the Emperor he received both money and a Royal Charter, which is still kept at the Monastery of St John the Forerunner, which Dionysios founded in 1380, and which is often referred to

as the Dionysiou Monastery. Later, pirates plundered the monastery, and Dionysius went to Trebizond, where he reposed at the age of seventy-two.

Prokopios the New Martyr

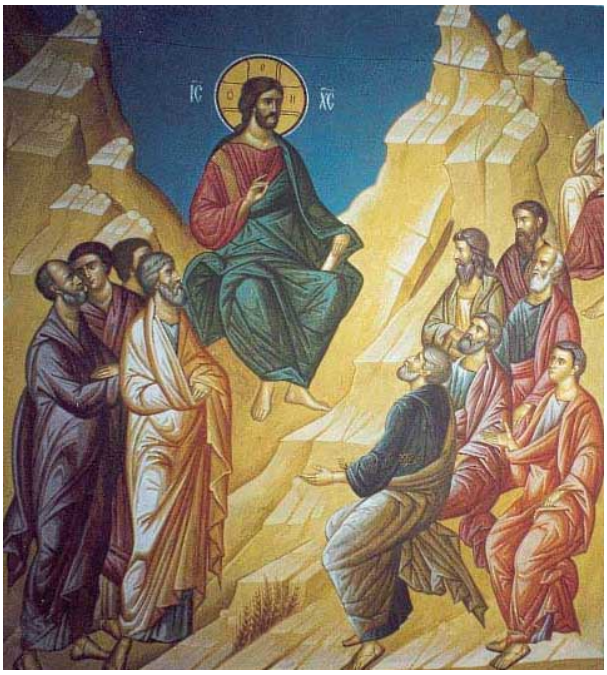
Day 25-Jun-2023 Sunday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

The lamp of the body is the eye
Romans 5:1-10; Matthew 6:22-33
5 Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord
Jesus Christ, 2through whom we also have our access by faith into this grace in
which we stand.
And we rejoice in hope of the glory of God! 3Not only this, but we also rejoice in
our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces perseverance; 4and perseverance,
character; and character, hope.
5 Hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out into our
hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.
6 For while we were still weak, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly.
7 Indeed, one will hardly die for someone righteous, but perhaps for a righteous
person someone would even dare to die.
8 But God entrusts his own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners,
Christ died for us.
9 Even more so then, since we are now justified by his blood, shall we be saved
from wrath through him! 10 For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to
God through the death of his Son, how much more shall we be saved by his life!

Gospel Reading: Third Sunday of Matthew: The lamp of the body is the eye

22 The lamp of the body is the eye! If therefore your eye is sound, your whole
body will be full of light.
23 But if your eye is evil, your whole body will be full of darkness.
If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! 24 No
one can serve two masters.
Either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will be devoted to one and
despise the other.
You cannot serve both God and Mammon.
c 25 Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, wondering what you
will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear.
Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 See the birds of
the sky: they do not sow, or reap, or gather into barns.
Your heavenly Father feeds them! Are you not of much more value than they? 27
Which of you, by being anxious, can add one moment to his lifespan? 28 Why then



are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow.
They do not toil or spin, 29 yet I tell you that even Solomon in all his glory was not dressed like one of these! 30 But if God clothes the grass of the field which today exists and tomorrow is thrown into the oven in such as way, will he not much more clothe you, you of little faith? 31 Therefore, do not be anxious, saying: 'What will we eat?,' 'What will we drink?' or, 'What will we wear?' 32 It is the Gentiles who seek after all these things, but your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.
33 Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

SERMON ON THE EPISTLE READING

The Heavenly father's care hen man thinks and plans about the future, there are two dominant sets of contradicting feelings in his heart: one is hope and anticipation and the other one is uncertainty and mistrust.
These two sets of feelings fight in his heart and although they should mutually exclude each other, man cannot but shelter them both in his mind simultaneously, experiencing an agonizing balance and a concoction of thoughts.
One then, cannot but wonder how one's heart can be placated when it goes such pressure.
The answer lies in removing oneself from the captivity of the worldly logic, which bring desperation to the mind, for no good thing can happen and no success can be achieved when man labours on his own and away from God.
To move forward in life and to maintain his spiritual balance man needs God, for outside God everything is vain: 'Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity! For all his toil, his toil under the sun, what does man gain by it?' (Eccl. 1: 2-3). God is our only hope and the only power that can guide us to the true freedom and fruitfulness of our efforts.
When man devotes his time, skills and abilities in pursuing material goods his success in life and the ideal of salvation both become elusive.
From their nature, material goods and worldly ideals tend to be insufficient to fulfil human needs, so man needs more and more all the time and still he is never satisfied.
Man is not solely a biological and worldly being, but he is mainly a spiritual one having primarily free will, volition and conscience.
When man sets eye to the worldly ideals he tends to forget about God and the gifts

that he has been bequeathed and he becomes slave to the needs and the worldly norms.
If man, however, entrusts his life to God and makes all the necessary efforts to keep continuous communication with God, he then is enlightened with His Grace and can overcome the problems of his life with the help of God.
He then accumulates both Grace and experience and can do better in the mission that God entrusted to him which is to love and help His children.
If man thinks that he can achieve both at the same time he is going to experience a great disappointment.
One cannot be devoted to two different and opposing things at the same time.
The logic and the economy of worldly goods and ideals are in a dynamic balance which demands a continuously growing effort in order to maintain the goods that man has been able to acquire.
It also tempts man to become greedy and want more and more all the time, until he reaches a point where both his powers and his time are insufficient to offer him the outcome that he desires.
Consequently, at the first stage – that of the effort – man forgets about God and at the final stage, when man experiences the disappointment of insufficiency of bit his efforts and of the outcome he longed for, more often than not, turns against or blaming Him for his failure and misery.
When man entrusts his life to God, he really finds the spiritual gifts and is offered the powers of love of God which firstly enable man to evaluate things in life correctly and prioritize his needs. Then, in sober state of mind and guided by divine providence he can utilize his skills so that he can pursue what he really needs at the right quantity and time.
Man is then free of anxiety and disappointment, devoid of passion and full of love and wisdom.
The emotional balance, the divine grace and enlightenment leads man to balance finely between true worldly prosperity and spiritual progress.
Happiness, justification and salvation can go hand in hand only when our eyes are turned to God, our spirit glorifies him, our hearts pray and our hands devote their work to Him and the wellbeing of His children, who are no other but our fellow men.
In unity with God with prayer, faith and by leaving ourselves to the care of God can we have both a life worth living and an eternity which will be fulfilling and within the perfection of the Grace of God.

Day 26-Jun-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

St David of Thessalonica (540)

For years he lived the ascetic life in a crude tree-house he had fashioned in the branches of an almond tree. Then he moved to Thessaly, where he continued his life of fasting, prayer and vigil, cleansing his soul and being made worthy to perform many miracles. Once, when the Emperor Justinian visited him, he took a live coal in his bare hand and censed the Emperor. The Emperor, seeing this, bowed to the ground before David. He reposed in peace.

Feast of the Tikhvin Icon of the Mother of God.

Feast of the Hodigritia Icon of the Mother of God

This icon was once kept in the Church of Blachernae in Constantinople. In 1383, it suddenly appeared in the sky over Lake Ladoga, then travelled through the air to the city of Tikhvin, where it alit by the River Tikhvina. A monastery was built there to house it. In the twentieth century it was brought to America. Innumerable miracles have been worked through this wonderworking icon, especially healings of children.

On this day is also commemorated the Hodigritia Icon of the Mother of God. According to many accounts, this icon and the Tikhvin Icon are one and the same, so we list them together. Hodigritia is translated "Directress" or more literally "She who shows the way." It was painted by Luke the Evangelist himself, who knew the Mother of God in the flesh. Over the years the icon was taken from Antioch to Jerusalem, then to Constantinople where it was enshrined in the Church of Blachernae. When Constantinople was attacked at the same time by the Persians and the Scythians, Patriarch Sergius carried the holy icon around the ramparts, and the city was miraculously delivered from its pagan enemies. During the iconoclast period, the icon was hidden in a wall in the monastery of the Pantocrator.

Day 26-Jun-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Romans 9:18-33; Matthew 11:2-15
18 And so, Godm has mercy on whom he desires,n and he hardens whom he desires.
19 You will then ask me, 'Why does Godo still find fault? Who can resist his will?'
20 But who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God?p Will the thing formed ask the one who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?' 21Does not the potterb have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one part a vessel for honor, and another for dishonor? 22 What if God, willing to show his wrath and also to make his power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath fitted for destruction; 23 and that he might make known the riches of his glory on vessels of mercy, which he prepared beforehand for glory? 24 That is us, whom he also called, not from the Jews only, but also from the Gentiles? 25 As he says also in Hosea: I will call them 'my people,' which were not my people; and her 'beloved,' who was not beloved.
It will be that in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' There they will be called 'children of the living God.
27 Isaias (Isaiah) cries concerning Israel: If the number of the children of Israel are as the sand of the sea, It is the remnant who will be saved;h For he will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, Because the Lord will make a short work upon the earth.
29 As Isaias (Isaiah) has said before: If the Lord of Hosts had not left us a seed, We would have become like Sodom,l And would have been made like Gomorrah.
The righteousness which is of faith 30 What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, [still] attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith; 31 but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not in fact arrive at the law of righteousness.
32 Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but by the works of the law! They stumbled over the stumbling stone, 33 even as it is written: Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and a rock of offense;a And no one who believes in him will be disappointed.

Gospel Reading:
2 Now, when John heard about the works of Christ from his prison, he sent two of his disciples 3to ask him, 'Are you the one who comes or should we look for

another?' 4 Jesus replied to them, 'Go and tell John about the things you hear and see: 5 the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up and the poor have Good News preached to them.
6 Blessed is he who finds no occasion for stumbling in me.
7 As they went their way, Jesus began to speak to the multitudes concerning John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? 8 If not, what did you go out to see? A man in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in king's houses!d 9 Why then did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and much more than a prophet! 10 Indeed, he is the one of whom it is written: Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.
f 11 Amen, I tell you: among those born of women, there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptizer! Yet the least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he.
12 From the days of John the Baptizer until now, the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.
13 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John [came].
14 If you are willing to accept it, this [John] is Elias (Elijah) who was to come.
15 Let anyone with ears listen!

Day 27-Jun-2023 Tuesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

St Sampson the Hospitable of Constantinople (530)

He is counted as one of the Holy Unmercenary Physicians. "This saint was born of rich and eminent parents in ancient Rome, where he studied all the secular wisdom of that time, devoting himself in particular to the study of medicine. Sampson was a compassionate and liberal physician, and gave the sick medicine for both soul and body, counselling each man to fulfil the requirements of the Christian faith. He moved to Constantinople, where he lived in a tiny house from which he distributed alms, comfort, advice, hope, medicine and all possible aid to those suffering in spirit and in body. The Patriarch heard of Sampson's great virtue and ordained him priest. At that time the Emperor Justinian the Great became ill with what his doctors believed to be an incurable disease. The Emperor prayed with great fervor, and God revealed to him in his sleep that Sampson would heal him. When the Emperor summoned Sampson to court, the old man had only to put his hand on the diseased place and the Emperor was healed. When Justinian offered him an immense sum of money, Sampson thanked him but would accept nothing, saying to the Emperor: 'O Emperor, I had silver and gold and other riches, but I left it all for the sake of Christ, that I might gain heavenly and eternal wealth.' When the Emperor insisted on doing something for him, Sampson asked him to build a house for the poor. In that home, Sampson cared for the poor as a father cares for his children. His compassion for the poor and weak was second nature to him. This holy man, filled with heavenly power and goodness, entered peacefully into rest on June 27th, 530. He was buried in the Church of the Holy Martyr Mocius, his kinsman. After his death, Sampson appeared many times to those who called upon him for aid." (Prologue)

St Severus the Priest (6th c.)

"He lived in central Italy. A man of rare holiness, he was once called to hear the confession of, and give Communion to, a man at the point of death. He tarried, working in his vineyard, and the news was brought to him there that the sick man had died. Stricken with grief, as if he had himself killed the man, he wept bitter tears over the corpse, and God raised the dead man to life

again in response to his fervent prayer. Then Severus confessed him and gave him Communion, preparing him for a Christian leaving of this world, and on the eighth day the man died again." (Prologue)

St Joanna the Myrrh-bearer (1st c.)

This is Joanna the wife of Chuza, a servant in Herod's household (Luke 8:3). When Herod had John the Baptist beheaded, it was Joanna who recovered the head and buried it on the Mount of Olives. She reposed in peace.

Day 27-Jun-2023 Tuesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Readings of the day: Romans 10:11-11:2; Matthew 11:16-20

10 With the heart, one believes, resulting in righteousness; and with the mouth
confession is made, resulting in salvation.
11 As the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes in him will not be disappointed.
12 Indeed, there is no distinction between Jew and Greek because the same Lord
is Lord of all, and he is generous k to all who call on him.
13 For, 'Whoever will call on the Name of the Lord will be saved.
14 But how will they call on him in whom they have not believed? How will they
believe in him whom they have not heard? How will they hear without a preacher?
15 And how will they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: How beautiful
are the feet of those who preach the Good News of peace,a Who bring glad tidings
of good things!
16 Still, they did not all listen to the Good News.
As Isaias (Isaiah) says, 'Lord, who has believed our report?'
17 And so, faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.
18 But I say, did they not hear? Yes, most certainly: Their sound went out into all
the earth, Their words to the ends of the world.
19 But I ask, did not Israel know? First, Moses says: I will provoke you to jealousy
with what is no nation, With a nation void of understanding I will make you angry.
20 Isaias (Isaiah) is very bold and says: I was found by those who did not seek
me.
I was revealed to those who did not ask for me.
h 21Yet, regarding Israel, he says: All day long I stretched out my hands to a
disobedient and opposing people.
11 I ask then, did God reject his people? May it never be! In fact, I too am an
Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.
2 God did not reject his people, which he foreknew.
Or do you not know what the Scripture says about Elias (Elijah), how he
complained to God against Israel:

Gospel Reading:

16 But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the
marketplaces who call to their friends 17 and say, 'We played the flute for you and
you did not dance.

We mourned for you and you did not lament!'
18 As it is, John came neither eating nor drinking, and so they say, 'He has a demon!' 19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and so they say, 'Behold, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Nevertheless, Wisdom is justified by her children!'a Woe on Chorazin and Bethsaida
20 He then began to rebuke the cities in which most of his deeds of power had been done, because the people did not repent

Day 28-Jun-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Sts Sergius and Herman (1353), abbots of Valaam

After helping to establish Orthodoxy among the Karelian Finns, they founded the famous Valaam Monastery on Lake Ladoga in northern Russia. Both reposed in the same year.

Synaxis of the Icon of our Most Holy Lady the Theotokos "Of the Three Hands"

Saint John of Damascus (December 4), the great defender of Orthodoxy against the iconoclasts, was falsely accused of plotting against the Caliph of Damascus through the intrigues of the iconoclast Emperor Leo the Isaurian (reigned 717-741). The Caliph ordered St John's hand to be cut off for his suspected treachery. The saint asked for the severed hand, and passed the night praying fervently for the aid before an icon of the most holy Theotokos. Waking in the morning, he found his hand miraculously restored, with only a scar around the wrist where it had been completely severed. In thanksgiving, St John had a silver hand mounted on the icon. When he became a monk in the monastery of St Sabbas in the Holy Land, he took the icon with him. It remained there until it was given to St Sabbas (Sava) of Serbia (January 14), who brought it to Serbia. Later it was miraculously taken to the Hilandar Monastery on the Holy Mountain (carried, according to legend, from Serbia to Mt Athos by an unguided donkey), where it may now be found.

Translation of the Relics (412)of the Holy and Wonderworking Unmercenaries Cyrus & John

They are counted among the Unmercenary Physicians. For their lives, see January 31.

Our Holy Father Sennuphius the Standard-Bearer (4th c.)

"A great ascetic and wonderworker of the Egyptian desert, he was a contemporary of Patriarch Theophilus and the Emperor Theodosius the Great. He is called 'the Standard-Bearer because he once helped the Emperor Theodosius to gain a victory over enemy forces by his prayers. When the Emperor summoned him to Constantinople, he replied that he was unable to go, but sent his torn and patched monastic habit and his staff. Going out to

battle, the Emperor put on Sennuphius's habit and carried his staff in his hand, and returned victorious from the battle." (Prologue)
Pappias the Martyr
Venerable Paul the Physician

Day 28-Jun-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Romans 11:2-12; Matthew 11:20-26
2 God did not reject his people, which he foreknew.
Or do you not know what the Scripture says about Elias (Elijah), how he complained to God against Israel: 3 'Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have broken down your altars! I am left alone, and they seek my life.
4 But how does God answer him? 'I have reserved for myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to Baal.
5 Likewise, at this present time, there is also a remnant according to the election of grace.
6 And if [it is] by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace.
But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.
7 What then? Israel did not obtain what it what seeking, but the elect obtained it; and the rest were hardened.
8 This is according to what is written: God gave them a spirit of deep sleep, Eyes not to see, and ears not to hear, Even to this very day.
9 As David says: Let their table become a snare and a trap; a stumbling block; Let it be their recompense! Let their eyes be darkened so that they may not see, And keep their backs forever bent.
11 I ask then, did they stumble in order to fall? May it never be! However, by their fall, salvation has come to the Gentiles, to provoke them to jealousy.
12 Now, if their fall is the treasure of the world, and their loss [has become] the riches of the Gentiles; how much greater riches will their fullness bring!

Gospel Reading:
20 He then began to rebuke the cities in which most of his deeds of power had been done, because the people did not repent.
21 'Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes! 22 But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you! 23 You, Capernaum, who [thought that you] were exalted to heaven, you will go down to hades! For if the deeds of power which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this [very] day.
24 But I tell you: on the day of judgment, it will be more tolerable for the land of

Sodom, than for you.
25 At that time, Jesus exclaimed, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth,
that you have hidden these things from the learned and intelligent, and revealed
them to infants! 26 Yes, Father, this was well-pleasing in your sight.

Day 29-Jun-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Saints Peter and Paul, the Holy Apostles

Peter was the son of Jonah and the brother of Andrew the First-called. He was of the tribe of Simeon, from the town of Bethsaida. He was a fisherman and was at first called Simon, but the Lord was pleased to call him Cephas, or Peter (John 1:42). He was the first of the disciples to clearly express faith in the Lord Jesus, saying: *Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God* (Matthew 16:16). His love for the Lord was great, and his faith in the Lord became gradually stronger. When the Lord was brought to trial, Peter denied Him three times; but after only one glance into the face of the Lord, Peter's soul was filled with shame and repentance. After the descent of the Holy Spirit, Peter showed himself to be a fearless and powerful preacher of the Gospel. Following one of his sermons in Jerusalem, three thousand souls were converted to the Faith. He preached the Gospel in Palestine, Asia Minor, Illyria and Italy. Peter worked many powerful miracles: he healed the sick and resurrected the dead, and the sick were healed even from his shadow. He had a great struggle with Simon the Magician, who proclaimed himself to be a god, but who was in reality a servant of Satan. Peter finally shamed and defeated him. By order of Simon's friend, the evil Emperor Nero, Peter was condemned to death. Having consecrated Linus Bishop of Rome, and having counseled and comforted the flock of Christ, Peter proceeded joyfully to his death. Seeing the cross before him, he begged his executioners to crucify him upside down, for he considered himself unworthy to die as had his Lord. Thus, this great servant of the Great Lord reposed and received a wreath of eternal glory.

Paul was born in Tarsus and was of the tribe of Benjamin. At first he was called Saul. He studied under Gamaliel, and was a Pharisee and a persecutor of Christianity. He was miraculously converted to the Christian Faith by the Lord Himself, Who appeared to him on the road to Damascus. He was baptized by the

Apostle Ananias, named Paul and numbered in the service of the Great Apostles. With fiery zeal Paul preached the Gospel everywhere, from the borders of Arabia to Spain, among the Jews and among the Gentiles, and received the title 'the Apostle to the Gentiles.' As horrible as his sufferings were, so much greater was his superhuman patience. Throughout all the years of his preaching, Paul hung from day to day as on a weak thread between life and death. Having filled all his days and nights with labor and suffering for Christ, having organized the Church in many places, and having attained such a degree of perfection, he was able to say: *not I, but Christ liveth in me* (Galatians 2:20). Paul was beheaded in Rome during the reign of Emperor Nero, at the same time as the martyrdom of the Apostle Peter.

Apolytikion

First in prominence among the Apostles, and teachers to the Universe, intercede to the Master of all for peace in the world and for our souls great mercy.

Unlearned and learned, but equal in spirit,
And as strong as angels in the love of God,
Peter a simple man, Paul educated,
Both were illumined by the grace of the Spirit.
Two flaming candles, unquenchable candles,
Towering and beautiful, two brilliant starts.
They traversed the earth and spread the light.
Nothing did they take, but to men they gave all;
They were utterly poor, but enriched the world;
They were prisoners and servants, but conquered the whole world.
With the teaching of Christ they enriched the world;
With new weapons they conquered the whole world:
With humility and peace and blessed meekness,
With prayer and fasting and powerful mercy.
When their stormy day passed into stormy night,
Bloodthirsty Nero cut short their lives.
But when Nero, the ruler of the world, issued a command,
Giving Peter and Paul over to suffering,
The world was theirs and no longer Nero’s;
By death the apostles gained the Kingdom.

By St. Nikolai Velimirovic

Day 29-Jun-2023 Thursday

Fast Free
Readings of the day: Romans 11:13-24; Matthew 11:27-30
13 For I speak to you who are Gentiles: since I am an apostle to Gentiles, I glorify my ministry.
14 May I somehow provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh so that I may save some of them.
15 For if their rejection means the reconciling of the world, what would their acceptance be, if not life from the dead? 16 If the first fruit is holy, so is the whole batch.
If the root is holy, so are the branches.
17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them.
Having {individually} become partaker with them of the root and of the richness of the olive tree; 18 do not boast over the branches! But [even] if you boast, it is not you who support the root, but the root supports you.
19 You will then say, 'Branches were broken off, so that I might be grafted in!' 20 True; by their unbelief they were broken off, and you stand [in] by your faith.
Do not be full of pride, but fear! 21Certainly, if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you!
22 You see, then, both the goodness and the severity of God.
Toward those who fell, severity [was shown]; but towards you, goodness, [that is], if you continue in his goodness.
Otherwise you also will be cut off.
23 As for them, if they do not continue in their unbelief, they will be grafted in {again}, because God is able to graft them in again.
24 If you were cut out of what is by nature a wild olive tree and were grafted against nature into a good olive tree, how much more will the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree!

Gospel Reading:
27 All things have been delivered to me by my Father.
No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and the one to whom the Son desires to reveal him.
28 Come to me, all of you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest! 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me because I am gentle and

humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls.
d 30 Indeed, my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Day 30-Jun-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Synaxis of the Holy, Glorious and All-praised Twelve Apostles

Though each of the Twelve Apostles has his own Feast day, on this day they are commemorated together. Of the Twelve, only St John the Theologian died in peace; the rest met a martyr's end. Following are their individual feast days and the manner of their end. Roman citizens could not be crucified: crucifixion was considered a shameful death unworthy of a citizen. For this reason the Apostle Paul was 'privileged' to be beheaded.

Peter: June 29, January 16. Crucified upside down.

Andrew: November 30. Crucified.

James the Son of Zebedee: April 30. Beheaded.

John the Theologian: September 26, May 8. Died in peace in a wondrous way.

Philip: November 14. Crucified.
Bartholomew: June 11, August 25. Crucified, then flayed and beheaded.
Thomas: October 6. Pierced with five spears.
Matthew the Evangelist: November 16. Burned to death.
James the Son of Aphaeos: October 9. Crucified.
Thaddeus (or Jude the brother of James): June 19. Crucified.
Simon the Zealot: May 10. Crucified.
Matthias: August 9. Stoned, then beheaded with an axe when dead.
Paul: June 29. Beheaded.

Day 30-Jun-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Romans 11:25-36; Matthew 12:1-8
25 Indeed, I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brethren, so that you may not claim to be wiser than you are: a partial hardening has happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles should come in.
26 And thus all Israel will be saved.
b Even as it is written: There will come out of Zion the Deliverer, and he will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.
This is my covenant to them, When I will take away their sins.
28 Concerning the Good News, they are enemies for your sake.
But concerning the election, they are beloved for the sake of the forefathers.
29 Indeed, without regret are the gifts and the calling of God! 30 In the past, you were disobedient to God, but now, you have obtained mercy by their disobedience.
31 Likewise, they also have now been disobedient, so that by the mercy shown to you they may also obtain mercy.
32 Inded, God has bound all human beings to disobedience, so that he might have mercy on all.
33 Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and how unfathomable are his ways! 34 For who has known the mind of the Lord?f Or who has been his counselor? Or who has first given to the Lord so as to be paid back?h 36 Indeed, from him, and through him, and to him, are all things.
To him be the glory unto the ages! Amen.
Gospel reading:

12 At that time, on the Sabbath day, Jesus was going through grain fields.
Being hungry, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain and to eat them.
2 When the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, 'Behold, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!' 3 But Jesus replied, 'Have not you read what David did, when he and those who were with him were hungry? 4 He entered into the house of God and ate the show bread,a which it was not lawful for him and those with him to eat, but only for the priests? 5 Or have you not read in the law, that on the Sabbath day, the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and yet remain without guilt? 6 But I tell you that someone greater than the temple is here!
7 If you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,'d you would not have condemned the innocent.
8 For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.

Day 01-Jul-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Holy and Wonderworking Unmercenaries Cosmas and Damian, martyrs at Rome (284)

Cosmas and Damian were unmercenary physicians and miracle-workers. These two saints were brothers, born in Rome. As children, they were baptized and brought up in the Christian spirit. They possessed abundant grace from God to heal men and livestock from every disease and suffering, usually by the laying on of hands. They sought no reward for their efforts, only requiring the infirm to believe in Christ the Lord. They compassionately distributed their inheritance of a large estate to the poor and those in need. At that time the Emperor Galerius was on the throne in Rome. Before Galerius, persecutors of Christianity brought these two holy brothers bound in chains. After prolonged interrogation, Galerius ordered them to deny Christ and offer sacrifices to idols. Cosmas and Damian not only refused to obey the emperor but counseled him to abandon the lifeless idols and recognize the One True God. 'Our God is not created, but rather He is the Creator of all. Your gods are the inventions of men and the work of the hands of mere craftsmen. If you did not have craftsmen to make your gods, you would have no one to worship.' After Cosmas and Damian had worked a miracle upon the emperor himself – they miraculously cured him of a grave infirmity – the emperor proclaimed the faith in Christ and released the holy brothers in peace. Cosmas and Damian continued to glorify God and heal the sick, and they were themselves glorified by the people on all sides. Envious of their glory, a certain doctor, a former teacher of theirs, led them into the mountains, under the pretext of gathering healing herbs, and stoned them to death. They suffered honorably for the Christian Faith in the year 284. Their memory remains eternal in the Church on earth, and their souls took up their habitation in the Kingdom of the Lord, to live eternally in glory and in joy.

Source: St. Nikolai Velimirovic, The Prologue of Ohrid – Volume Two

Apolytikion

Sainted Unmercenaries and Wonder Workers, regard our infirmities; freely you have received, freely share with us.

Kontakion

Having received the grace of healing, ye extend health to those in need, O glorious and wonderworking physicians. Hence, by your visitation, cast down the audacity of our enemies, and by your miracles, heal the world.

New Martyr Constantine of Cyprus
Venerable Peter the Patrician

Day 01-Jul-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Romans 6:11-17; Matthew 8:14-23

11 Thus, consider yourselves to be dead as regards sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
12 And so, do not let sin rule in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.
13 Also, do not present your members to sin as instruments of unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God, as alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.
14 Sin will not have dominion over you because you are not under law but under grace! 15 What then? Shall we sin, because we are not under law, but under grace? May it never be so! 16 Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey; whether of sin to death, or of obedience to righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God, that, although you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed.

Gospel Reading:

14 When Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying sick with a fever.
15 He touched her hand, and the fever left her.
She got up and served him.
a 16 When evening came, many who were possessed with demons were brought to him.
He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick.
17 Thus, what had been spoken through Isaias (Isaiah) the prophet was fulfilled:
He took our infirmities, and bore our diseases.
b 18 Now, when Jesus saw great crowds around him, he gave the order to depart to the other side.
Requirements for discipleship – The calming of the storm 19 A scribe came and said to him, 'Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go!' 20 Jesus replied, 'The foxes have holes and the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.
21Another of his disciples said to Jesus,c 'Lord, allow me first to go and bury my father.

22 But Jesus replied, 'Follow me, and let the dead bury their [own] dead.
23 When he got into a boat, his disciples followed him.

Day 02-Jul-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

The Placing of the Honorable Robe of the Most Holy Theotokos at Blachernae

In the time of Emperor Leo the Great (457-474) and Empress Verina and Patriarch Gennadius, two noblemen from Constantinople, Galibus and Candidus, were traveling in the Holy Land to venerate the holy places. They stopped in Nazareth for a while, at the home of a Jewish maiden who kept the robe of the All-holy Mother of God in a secret room. Many who were ill and in need received healing of their sufferings through prayer and touching the robe. Galibus and Candidus brought this holy object to Constantinople and reported it to the emperor and patriarch. This brought about great joy in the imperial city. The robe was solemnly placed in the Church of Blachernae. (This church had been built by Emperor Marcian and Empress Pulcheria on the shore of an inlet, and was called Blachernae after Blacheran, a commander from Scetis, who had been slain there.) This feast was instituted in remembrance of the placing of the robe of the All-holy Theotokos in the Church of Blachernae.

From *The Prologue of Ohrid* by St. Nikolai Velimirovic

Apolytikion

O Ever-Virgin Theotokos, shelter of mankind, thou hast bestowed upon thy people a mighty investure, even thine immaculate body's raiment and sash, which by thy seedless childbirth have remained incorrupt; for in thee nature and time are made new. Wherefore, we implore thee to grant peace to the world, and great mercy to our souls

Kontakion

O godly shelter that dost cover all mankind, the sacred robe that covered thy sacred body hast thou bestowed on all the faithful graciously, O pure Virgin, as a robe of divine incorruption. As we celebrate with love its august deposition, we cry to thee with fear, O graced of God: Rejoice, O modest one, boast of the Christian race.

† St John (Maximovich), Archbishop of Shanghai and San Francisco (1966) (June 19 OC)

This brightly-shining Saint of our own day was born in Russia in 1896. In 1921 his family fled the Russian Revolution to Serbia, where he became a monk and was ordained a priest. From the time of his entry into monastic life he adopted a severely ascetical way of life: for the rest of his life he never slept in a bed, sleeping only briefly in a chair or prostrated before the icons. He ate one meal a day, in the evening. Teaching seminarians in Serbia, he instructed them each day to devote six hours to divine services, six hours to prayer (not including the divine services!), six hours to good works, and six hours to rest (these six hours obviously included eating and bathing as well as sleeping). Whether his seminarians followed his counsels we do not know, but he himself not only followed but exceeded them.

In 1934 he was made Bishop of Shanghai (in the Russian Church Abroad), where he served not only the Russian emigre community but a number of native Chinese Orthodox; from time to time he served the Divine Liturgy in Chinese. When the Communists took power in China, he labored tirelessly to evacuate his flock to safety, first to the Philippines, then to various western countries including the United States. He served as Bishop in Paris and Brussels, then, in 1962 was made Archbishop of San Francisco. Throughout his life as monk and hierarch he was revered (and sometimes condemned) for his ascetical labors and unceasing intercessions. During his life and ever since, numerous miraculous healings of all manner of afflictions have been accomplished through his prayers. Once, in Shanghai, a caretaker, investigating strange noises in the cathedral after midnight, discovered Bishop John standing in the belltower, looking down on the city and praying for the people. Years later, when he visited Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville, New York, the priest responsible for hosting him found the saint walking through the halls of the monastery, standing outside the door of each room and praying for the monk or seminarian sleeping within. When the Archbishop had prayed outside each room, he returned to the beginning of his circuit and began praying again; and so he spent the entire night.

Even as Archbishop, he lived in near-absolute poverty. His appearance was striking: His cassock was made of blue Chinese "peasant cloth," crudely decorated with crosses stitched by orphans who had been in his care in Shanghai. His Bishop's "miter" was often a cloth cap to which he had glued paper icons. Even in the United States, even while serving the Divine Liturgy

(which he did every day), he went barefoot in all seasons. (Eventually, after he was hospitalized with an infected foot, his Metropolitan ordered him to wear shoes; thereafter, he wore sandals). Needless to say, he was an embarrassment to those who like their bishops to make a more worldly appearance, but among his various flocks throughout the world, there were always those who recognized him as a Saint in his own lifetime.

Following his repose in 1966, a steady stream of healings and other miracles was accomplished through his intercessions, and in 1996 he was glorified as a Saint of the Church. His incorrupt and wonder-working relics can be venerated at his cathedral in San Francisco. At St John's funeral, the eulogist told his mourners (and all of us): because Archbishop John was able to live the spirituality of the Orthodox Church so fully, even in modern, western, urban society, we are without excuse.

Footnote: An acquaintance of Monk John once met him on a train in Serbia. When asked his destination, Monk John replied, "I'm going to straighten out a mistake. I've gotten a letter meant for some other John whom they intend to make a bishop." The same person met him again on his return journey and asked if he had been able to resolve his problem. John answered, "The mistake is much worse than I thought: they did make me a bishop."

St Juvenal, Patriarch of Jerusalem (458)

A zealous hierarch, he took part in two Ecumenical Councils: the Third in Ephesus, which rebuked the doctrines of Nestorius; and the Fourth at Chalcedon, which rebuked the teachings of Eutyches and Dioscoros that Christ has only one nature, divine but not human. Following these councils, he returned to his see in Jerusalem. But through the plotting of Dioscoros' allies, he was driven from his throne and Theodosius, a monophysite, was installed in his place. The Empress Eudocia, widow of the Emperor Theodosius the younger, initially supported the heretics. But, unsure of the true Orthodox doctrine, she went to inquire of St Symeon the Stylite, who denounced the monophysite doctrine and told the Empress to do all that she could to uphold the teaching of the Councils. Obeying him, she condemned the false Patriarch Theodosius and prevailed on the Emperor Marcian to have him deposed. Thus St Juvenal was at last restored to his patriarchal throne. He served the Church in peace, for a total of thirty-eight years, and reposed at a great old age.

St Juvenaly, First Martyr of America and Alaska (1796)

"St Juvenal was (together with St Herman, see Dec. 12) a member of the first mission sent from Russia to proclaim the Gospel in the New World. He was a priest-monk, and a zealous follower of the Apostles, and baptized hundreds of the natives of Alaska. He was martyred by enraged pagans in 1796." (Great Horologion)

Day 02-Jul-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

The Centurion's Servant
Romans 6:18-23; Matthew 8:5-13
18 Having been released from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.
19 I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh.
Indeed, as you used to offer your members as servants of impurity and
everincreasing wickedness, now offer your members as servants of righteousness
for sanctification.
20 For when you were servants of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.
21 What fruit did you obtain at that time by those things which now shame you?
The end result of those things is death! 22 But now, being made free from sin and
having become servants of God, you have your fruit of sanctification, and the
result of eternal life.
23 The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus
our Lord.

Gospel Reading: 4th Sunday after Pentecost: The Centurion's Servant

5 When Jesus came
into Capernaum, a
centurion came to him,
asking 6 and saying,
'Lord, my servant is
lying in the house
paralyzed, grievously
tormented.
7 Jesus answered, 'I
will come and heal
him.
8 But the centurion
replied, 'Lord, I am not
worthy that you should
come under my roof!
Only say the word and
my servant shall be

healed.
9 For I am also a man under authority, having soldiers under my own authority.
I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and if I tell another, 'Come,' he comes.
Or if I tell my servant, 'Do this,' he does it!' 10 When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed, 'Amen, I tell you that I have never found so great a faith, not even in Israel! 11 I tell you that many will come from the east and the west, and will sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven.
12 But the children of the Kingdom will be thrown out into the outer darkness and there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
13 Jesus said to the centurion, 'Go your way.
Let it be done for you as you have believed.
And his servant was healed in that hour.

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING

Faith and veneration prove to be the source of spiritual and physical health and salvation Following the Sermon on the Mount (Mt chapters 5-7), Jesus proceeded to Capernaum where a Centurion approached Him to ask that his servant who was very ill might be healed and not die.
Before looking at the whole incident we need to see what a centurion meant at that time and what role centurions played in the New Testament.
A Centurion was an army officer, usually in charge of one hundred foot-soldiers and although he was an officer, he was often an ordinary soldier who was promoted to this rank.
His duties included field command and the supervision of capital punishments.
In the New Testament we see a Centurion three more times: once in the crucifixion of Christ (Mk 15:39), once in the book of Acts (Acts 27:1) when he conducts Paul safely to Rome and once when the Centurion Cornelius is converted to the faith and Luke devotes a whole chapter to him (Acts ch. 10). The Centurion who, in the world was the most recognizable symbol of the capital punishment - a law enforced murder - became a symbol of devotion and supplication of the Gentiles when he came to meet Christ.
He is the proof that 'where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom 5:20). Such a man approaches Jesus and asks that the Lord, as he calls Him, heal the Centurion’s servant.
Jesus’s question on whether he should go to the officer’s house is met with humbleness and self-consciousness.
The Centurion knows that he is a sinful man and not worth of the honour of accepting Jesus in his house.
This echoes John the Baptist who initially tried to abscond baptizing Jesus because He was not worthy even to 'stoop down and untie" His laces.
(cf.

Mt 3:14; Mk 1:7). The Centurion acknowledges the authority and the power of Jesus over life and death giving an analogy to his own authority an officer.
He commands his soldiers and they obey.
In the same way the Centurion believes that Jesus can command life and death without being present as distance is not an obstacle of authority.
Indeed, the servant was healed at that very moment because of the Centurion's faith in Jesus, the Son of God.
Once more the key to the healing of any man is love and faith.
The Centurion loved his servant so much that any kind of pride, any idea of attitude which could nurture a sense of authority, or pomposity and selfishness vanished.
There is no sense of superiority and pride in a sensible man before anguish and the fear of death.
Only trust in God (i.e. faith) and prayer can be the steadfast allies of a prudent and rational man in the quest for health both physical and spiritual.
We hear from Jesus Himself that it is not the fact that someone thinks or says that he is a member of a religion or a 'church" that can bring salvation to man.
The Jews, who had the sign of the religion of the One God on their body rather than their soul, by being circumcised, had not had the indelible stamp of faith in their hearts, where it should have been engraved.
What awaits such people is alienation from God, as they have chosen.
The periscope we have just heard says: 'They will be thrown into the extreme darkness and there will be weeping and grinding of the teeth" (Mt 8:12). This is not a punishment from God, but the result of their own choice, the fruit of their own free will, because they saw and used religion and faith as a vehicle for saliency.
However, for those who do not see faith under this light, but they see it as the only hope of love in the world, a means of communication with the Triune God and the source of spiritual and physical health, it offers the greatest and most satisfactory blessing in life.
This is the blessing and sanctification of their very existence.
Faith offers man a healthy physical and spiritual life and turns this world to a foretaste of the heavenly peace and absolute rightfulness of God with whom we are meant to live in eternity.
Amen

Day 03-Jul-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Martyr Hyacinth of Caesarea in Cappadocia, and those with him (108)

He was a young courtier to the Emperor Trajan, and a secret Christian. When the Emperor and his court were offering sacrifice to the idols, Hyacinth stood apart; he was noticed and brought before the Emperor where, when interrogated, he proclaimed himself a Christian and refused to make sacrifice to the pagan gods. For this he was brutally whipped, then thrown into prison, where the Emperor ordered that he be given only food that had been sacrificed to idols. This Hyacinth refused to eat and, after eight days, died in prison.

Our Holy Father Isaiah the Solitary (491)

One of the Desert Fathers, he lived in asceticism first at Scetis in Egypt, then in Palestine; he died in Gaza. His instructive writings are often quoted by the Fathers.

Abba Isaiah said: The crown of all good works consists in this: that a man place all his hope in God, that he flee to Him once and for all with all his heart and strength, that he be filled with compassion for all and weep before God, imploring His help and mercy.

Our Holy Father Alexander, founder of the Monastery of the Unsleeping Ones (430)

"Born in Asia and educated in Constantinople, he went into the army after completing his studies and became an officer. Reading the Holy Scriptures, he came upon the Saviour's words: 'If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell all thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow Me' (Matt. 19:21). These words made such an impression on him that he sold and gave away all that he had, and went off to the desert. After long asceticism and striving for purification, he founded the community of the 'Wakeful Ones' (Acoemetae) with a special rule. According to this rule, the services in the church continued day and night in unbroken sequence. The brethren were divided into six groups, each having its appointed hours of day or night to go to church and take over the reading and singing from the previous group. He travelled a great deal over the East, bringing people to faith in Christ, disputing with heretics, working miracles by God's grace and growing old in the service of the Lord Jesus. He finished his earthly course in Constantinople in the year 430, where his relics revealed the miraculous power and glory with which God had glorified His holy servant." (Prologue)

Our Father among the Saints Anatolios, Archbishop of Constantinople (458)

He was a priest from Alexandria. At the 'Robber Council' at Ephesus in 449, Dioscoros, the monophysite who occupied the Patriarchal throne in Alexandria, had Anatolios installed as Patriarch of Constantinople, thinking that he would prove an ally. But Anatolios quickly emerged as a fervent champion of Orthodoxy: he convened a council of bishops just before the Council of Chalcedon in 451, at which Pope Leo's Orthodox "Tome" (see February 18) was approved, though Dioscoros had not allowed it to be read at the Robber Council. At the Council of Chalcedon, Anatolios condemned Nestorius, Eutyches, and his frustrated patron Dioscoros. He reposed in peace in 458.

Anatolios is believed to be the author of the 'Anatolian Stichera' found in the weekly Vespers and Matins services; but these may have been composed by another Anatolios, a monk and a disciple of St Theodore the Studite.

Day 03-Jul-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Romans 12:4-5, 15-21; Matthew 12:9-13
4 For even as we have many members in one body, and all the members do not
have the same function, 5 likewise we, who are many, are one body in Christ and
individually members of one another.
15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep! 16 Be of the same
mind one toward another.
Do not set your mind on exalted things, but associate with the humble.
Do not think that you are wiser than you really are.
17 Repay no one evil for evil.
Show respect for what is honorable in the sight of all.
18 If it is possible, as much as is in your power, be at peace with all people.
19 Do not seek revenge, beloved, but let God's wrath follow its course.
As it is written, 'Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the Lord.
20 Therefore: If your enemy is hungry, feed him.
d If he is thirsty, give him a drink; In doing so, you will heap coals of fire on his
head.
21 Do not be overcome by evil; instead, overcome evil with good.

Gospel Reading:
9 Going from that place, he went into their synagogue.
10 And behold, there was a man with a withered hand.
Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, the Pharisees asked him, 'Is it lawful to heal
on the Sabbath day?' 11 Jesus replied, 'Who among you, having one sheep, and if
this one falls into a pit on the Sabbath day, will not take hold of it and lift it out? 12
Of how much more value is a man compared to a sheep! Therefore, it is lawful to
do what is good on the Sabbath day.
13 Then he told the man, 'Stretch out your hand.
The man stretched it out, and it was restored whole, just like the other hand!

Day 04-Jul-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

† Holy Royal Martyrs of Russia: Tsar Nicholas II, Tsaritsa Alexandra, Alexei, Olga,Tatiana, Maria,and Anastasia, and those martyred with them (1918).

"Tsar Nicholas II was the son of Alexander III, who had reposed in the arms of St John of Kronstadt. Having been raised in piety, Tsar Nicholas ever sought to rule in a spirit consonant with the precepts of Orthodoxy and the best traditions of his nation. Tsaritsa Alexandra, a grand-daughter of Queen Victoria of England, and a convert from Lutheranism, was noted for her piety and compassion for the poor and suffering. Their five children were beloved of all for their kindness, modesty, and guilelessness.

"Amidst the political turmoil of 1917, Tsar Nicholas selflessly abdicated the throne for what he believed was the good of his country. Although he had abdicated willingly, the revolutionaries put him and his family under house arrest, then sent them under guard to Tobolsk and finally Ekaterinburg. A letter written from Tobolsk by Grand Duchess Olga, the eldest of the children, shows their nobility of soul. She writes, 'My father asks that I convey to all those who have remained devoted to him... that they should not take vengeance on his account, because he has forgiven everyone and prays for them all. Nor should they avenge themselves. Rather, they should bear in mind that this evil which is now present in the world will become yet stronger, but that evil will not conquer evil, but only love shall do so.'

"After enduring sixteen months of imprisonment, deprivation, and humiliation with a Christian patience which moved even their captors, they and those who were with them gained their crowns of martyrdom when they were shot and stabbed to death in the cellar of the Ipatiev house in Ekaterinburg in 1918.

"Together with them are also commemorated those who faithfully served them, and were either slain with them, or on their account..." (Great Horologion)

† St Andrew, archbishop of Crete (720?)

He was born in Damascus to Christian parents. He was mute until the age of seven, when he was given the power of speech upon receiving Holy Communion. Tonsured a monk at the monastery of St Sabbas in the Holy Land, he served the Patriarch of Jerusalem, then became deacon in the Great Church in Constantinople, and finally was made Archbishop of Crete. He was present at the Sixth Ecumenical Council. Accounts of the date of his repose vary from 712 to 740.

He is best known as the composer of the Great Canon, sung during the first and fifth weeks of the Great Fast.

St Martha, mother of St Symeon of the Wonderful Mountain (551)

She was a model of the Christian married life: she rose at midnight for prayer, she gave to the needy without reserve, and she bore and raised the holy Symeon of the Wonderful Mountain (May 24). Having foreseen the hour of her death, she reposed peacefully in 551, and was buried near the pillar of her son Simeon. After her death, she appeared many times to teach and to heal the sick. The Prologue tells the following story. After her funeral, the abbot of St Simeon's monastic community kept a lamp burning at her grave, intending that it be kept burning perpetually. But after awhile, the monks grew forgetful and allowed the lamp to go out. The abbot became ill, and St Martha appeared to him and said 'Why are you not lighting the lamp on my grave? Know that the light of your candles is not needful to me, because God has made me worthy of His eternal, heavenly light, but it is needful for you. When you burn a light on my grave, you urge me to pray to the Lord for you.'

St Andrew (Rublev), iconographer (1430)

His "Holy Trinity" icon of the Hospitality of Abraham is sometimes called the most perfectly executed of all icons. See January 29.

Saint Martha, Mother of Saint Symeon the Stylite (May 24)

Day 04-Jul-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free
Readings of the day: Romans 14:9-18; Matthew 12:14-16, 22-30
9 It is for this purpose that Christ died, rose, and lived again, so that he might be
Lord of both the dead and the living.
10 But [as for] you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you
despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.
11 As it is written: 'As I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow to me;c Every
tongue will confess to God.
12 And so, each of us will give a personal account to God.
13 Therefore, let us not judge one another any more.
Instead, resolve that no one should put a stumbling block in his brother's way, or
an occasion for falling.
14 In the Lord Jesus, I know and I am convinced that nothing is unclean of itself.
But to the one who considers anything to be unclean, to such a one it is unclean!
15 Yet, if because of food your brother is grieved, you no longer walk in love.
Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.
16 Thus, do not let what is good to you become a cause of evil things being said,
17 because the Kingdom of God is not [about] eating and drinking, but [it is about]
righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.
18 Certainly, whoever serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and
approved by all.

Gospel Reading:
14 But the Pharisees went out and began to conspire against him, [discussing]
how they might destroy him.
15 Perceiving it, Jesus withdrew from that place.
Many [people] followed him and he healed them all, 16 commanding them not to
reveal who he was,
22 Then, a person possessed by a demon, blind and mute, was brought to him.
Jesus healed him, so that the blind and mute man was now able to speak and to
see.
23 The crowds were amazed and exclaimed, 'Can this be the son of David?' 24
However, when the Pharisees heard this, they said, 'This man can only cast out
demons by {the authority of} Beelzebul, the prince of the demons!'
25 Knowing their thoughts, Jesus told them, 'Every kingdom divided against itself
is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not

stand.
26 If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself.
How then will his kingdom stand? 27 If it is by Beelzebul that I cast out demons, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore, they will be your judges.
28 However, if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you.
29 Or how can someone enter into the house of the strong man and plunder his goods, unless he first bind the strong man? Then he will [be able to] plunder his house.
30 Whoever is not with me is against me! Whoever does not gather with me scatters!d

Day 05-Jul-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

† St Athanasius of Mt Athos (1003) and his six disciples

Athanasius was born in Trebizond of God-fearing parents. He was orphaned at an early age, but by the providence of God a military officer took him under his care and brought him to Constantinople to be educated. Because of his meekness and humbleness, he was the favorite of his peers. During their games, the children chose one to be an emperor, another a commander – and Athanasius an abbot, as though it were a prophecy! Having completed his education, Athanasius (who before tonsure was called Abraham) withdrew into the desert of Maleinos near the Holy Mountain, where he lived the life of an ascetic, as a disciple of the then renowned Michael Maleinos. Desiring a more difficult life of asceticism, Athanasius moved to Mount Athos, to live in silence. But many that were desirous of a life of asceticism began to gather around him, and he was compelled to build his famous Lavra. He was assisted in this by the Byzantine emperors, first by Nicephorus Phocas, who himself intended to withdraw and become a monk, and then by John Tzimiskes. Countless temptations befell Athanasius, both from demons and from men – but he, as a brave soldier of Christ, resisted and conquered them all, by his immeasurable meekness and continual prayer to the Living God. Filled with the grace of God, Athanasius was found worthy to see the All-holy Theotokos, who miraculously brought forth water from a rock and promised that she would always be the Abbess of the monastery. In work and in prayer, Athanasius surpassed his brethren, and he loved all with the love of a spiritual father and shepherd. Death came to Athanasius unexpectedly. He and six other monks had climbed up onto a newly built vestibule of the church to inspect a wall that was being constructed, and the wall caved in on them and buried them. Thus died this great beacon of monasticism, in the year 1003. Many times following his death Athanasius appeared to his brethren – sometimes to comfort them, and sometimes to reprimand them.

From *The Prologue of Ohrid* by St. Nikolai Velimirovic

Apolytikion

The Angels' ranks were awed by thy life in the flesh, how, though corporeal, and clad with earthly clay, thou didst set forth with courage to invisible wars and wrestlings and didst boldly smite the hordes of the demons with mortal wounds. Wherefore, Christ rewarded thee with abundant gifts in return. Entreat Him that our souls find salvation, O most renowned Father Athanasius.

Kontakion

The yoke of thy Christ, thou tookest on thyself with faith, while bearing thy cross upon thy shoulders as a true and unrivalled emulator of His dread Passion and sharer of His great glory, partaking of divine and unending joy, O Athanasius.

† Uncovering of the Relics (1422) of St Sergius of Radonezh (1392)

For his life, see September 25.

Martyrdom of St Elizabeth Romanov and Nun Barbara (1918)

Grand Duchess Elizabeth was a grand-daughter of Queen Victoria of England and the older sister of the Empress Alexandra (July 4). After marrying Grand Duke Sergei she converted to the Orthodox faith, though this was not required by her position. After her husband was assassinated in 1905, she took monastic vows and withdrew from the world, founding the Convent of Saints Mary and Martha. There she served as superior, devoting her time to prayer, fasting, and caring for the sick and the poor.

During the Russian Revolution, she was seized by the God-hating Bolsheviks and taken to the Urals, where she and several with her were martyred by being thrown alive down an abandoned mine-shaft. When the fall did not kill them, soldiers threw grenades down the shaft to complete their work. Saint Elizabeth was singing the Cherubic Hymn when she died.

The Nun Barbara, her cell-attendant, voluntarily followed St Elizabeth into exile and received martyrdom with her. Their relics were recovered and taken at great risk to China, then to Jerusalem, where they were deposited in the Convent of St Mary Magdalene. When their reliquaries were opened in 1981, their bodies were found to be partly incorrupt, and gave off a sweet fragrance.

Footnote: After the assassination of her husband in Moscow, Grand Duchess Elizabeth had a cross erected at the site of his death, bearing the inscription "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." After the revolution, the cross remained standing through the devotion of the people of Moscow to St Elizabeth, until it was personally torn down by Lenin.

Our Holy Father the New Martyr Cyprian (1679)

"Born in the village of Klitzos in Epirus, Cyprian went off to the Holy Mountain after the death of his devout parents. He became a monk there and gave himself to asceticism in a cell near the monastery of Koutloumousiou. He heaped labour upon labour on himself, asceticism upon asceticism, until he came to be known and respected all over the Holy Mountain. But he was not satisfied. He was tormented by the thought that he could not be saved but by martyrdom for Christ. He therefore left the Holy Mountain and went to Salonica, appeared before the Pasha of Salonica and urged him to discard the false, Mohammedan faith and receive the true Faith of Christ. The Pasha ordered that he be whipped and driven out of the city. Dissatisfied with such little suffering for Christ, Cyprian went to Constantinople and wrote a letter to the Grand Vizier in which he set down the falseness of Mahomet and the truth of Christ the Lord. The enraged Vizier sent him to Sheik ul-Islam, and the latter heard all that Cyprian had to say, then ordered that he be beheaded. Cyprian was filled with joy beyond measure, and went to the scaffold as to his wedding. Thus this godly man suffered for Christ on July 5, 1679, and fulfilled his strong desire." (Prologue)

Venerable Lampadus the Wonderworker

Day 05-Jul-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Romans 15:7-16; Matthew 12:38-45
7 Therefore, accept one another, even as Christ also accepted you, to the glory of God.
8 Now, I say that Christ was made a servant of the circumcision for the truth of God, so that he might confirm the promises given to the fathers,
9 and so that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.
As it is written: Therefore, I will give you praise among the Gentiles, And sing to your Name.
a 10 Again he says: Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people.
b 11 Again: Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles! Let all the peoples praise him.
12 Again, Isaias (Isaiah) says: There will be the root of Jesse, He who arises to rule over the Gentiles; In him the Gentiles will hope.
d13 Now, may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope and in the power of the Holy Spirit.
Paul's ministry and plans
14 I myself am also convinced about you, my brethren, that you are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to instruct others.
15 But I write all the more boldly to you, as reminding you, because of the grace that was given to me by God,
16 that I should be a servant of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles.
I should serve as a priest the Good News of God, so that the offering up of the Gentiles might become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Gospel Reading:
38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said, 'Teacher, we want to see a sign from you!' 39 But Jesus answered, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, but no sign will be given to this generation except for the sign of Jonah the prophet.
40 For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.
41 The people of Nineveh will stand up in the judgment with this generation and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah.
And behold, someone greater than Jonah is here! 42 The queen of the south will stand up in the judgment with this generation and she will condemn it because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon.

And behold, someone greater than Solomon is here! An unclean spirit leaves and returns
43 After an unclean spirit has gone out of a man, he wanders through dry places seeking rest and does not find it.
44 He then says, 'I will return into my house from which I came out,' and when he has come back, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order!
45 Then, he goes [around] and brings with himself seven other spirits more evil than he, and they enter in and dwell there.
And so, the last state of that person becomes worse than the first.
This is how it will be with this evil generation.

Day 06-Jul-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Our Holy Father Sisoës the Great of Egypt (429)

One of the greatest of the Desert Fathers, he lived in asceticism at Scetis in Egypt. After the death of St Anthony the great, Abba Sisoës became a hermit in Anthony's cave, saying "Thus in the cave of a lion, a fox makes his dwelling." In his own lifetime he was granted the grace to heal the sick, drive out unclean spirits, and even raise the dead.

As his death approached after a long life in the desert, his brethren gathered around him. His face began to shine, and he said, "See, Abba Anthony is here!" then, "See, the choir of the prophets is here!" Seeing that he seemed to be speaking with someone, his brethren asked him who it was. He replied, "The Angels are here, and I am asking them for time to repent." Amazed, they asked him what he could have to repent of, to which he replied, "Brethren, I do not know if I have even begun to repent." Finally, his face became as bright as the sun, and he said, "See, the Lord is here, and He says, 'Bring Me the vessel of the desert.'" With this, he gave his soul up to God, and his entire dwelling was filled with light and sweet fragrance.

Some of his teaching, as told in the Prologue: "St Sisoës taught his monks: 'When temptation comes to a man, that man must give himself over to the will of God, and acknowledge that the temptation comes upon him because of his sins. If something good comes to pass, he must acknowledge that it comes about by the providence of God.' A monk asked him: 'How can I please God and be saved?' The saint replied: 'If you desire to please God, withdraw from the world, separate yourself from the earth, leave aside creation and draw near to the Creator, unite yourself to God with prayers and tears, and you will find rest in this world and in the next.' A monk asked Sisoes: 'How can I acquire humility?' The saint replied: 'When a man learns to regard every man as better than himself, he thus acquires humility.' Ammon complained to Sisoes that he could not memorise the wise sayings that he had read, to be able to quote them in conversation with others. The saint replied: 'It is not

necessary. That which is necessary is to acquire purity of mind and to speak from this purity, placing one's hope in God.'"

Holy Martyrs Marinus and Martha, and those with them (269)

Marinus and Martha were wealthy Persians; but they sold all their goods and traveled to Rome with their sons Audifax, Habakkuk, Valentine, and Cyrinus, in order to venerate the holy relics of the apostles and martyrs. When the Emperor Claudius asked them why they had come so far, at such cost, to seek the dead in Rome, they answered 'We are servants of Christ, and are come to venerate the holy apostles whose immortal souls are alive with God, that they may be our intercessors with Christ our God.' All of them were sentenced to interrogation and to death if they would not deny Christ. Valentine, who was a priest, was handed over to a General named Asterius. When Valentine healed Asterius' daughter, who had been blind for two years, Asterius and his entire household accepted Christ and were baptised by Valentine. All of them, along with Marinus and Martha and their family, underwent torture and death for the sake of Christ.

The Finding of the Relics of Saint Juliana the Virgin

Day 06-Jul-2023 Thursday

Fast Free
Readings of the day: Romans 15:17-29; Matthew 12:46-13:3
17 I have my boasting in Christ Jesus in things pertaining to God 18 because I will
not dare to speak of anything except of what Christ has worked through me.
This is for the obedience of the Gentiles, by word and deed, 19 in the power of
signs and wonders, in the power of God's Spirit.
And so, from Jerusalem, and as far as Illyricum, I have fully preached the Good
News of Christ.
20 Yes, I have made it my goal to preach the Good News where Christ was not
already called upon, in order not to build on someone else's foundation.
21 But, as it is written: Those to whom no tidings of him came will see.
Those who have not heard will understand.
a 22 For this reason, I was hindered many times from coming to you.
23 But now, since I no longer have any place in these regions and since I had for
many years a longing to come to you, 24 I [write that I] will come to you whenever I
travel to Spain, in order to be helped on my way there by you, and first of all to
enjoy your company for a while.
25 But now, I want you to know that I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the
saints.
26 It has been the good pleasure of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain
contribution for the poor among the saints who are at Jerusalem.
27 Yes, it has been their good pleasure, as they are in debt to them.
For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, they owe it to
them to be of service in material things.
28 After I accomplish this and deliver this harvest to them, I will go to Spain by
your way.
29 I know that, when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of the
Good News of Christ.

Gospel Reading:
46 While Jesus was still speaking to the multitudes, behold, his mother and his
brothers stood outside, desiring to speak to him.
47 Someone said to him, 'Behold, your mother and your brothers stand outside,
desiring to see you.
48 But to the person who had spoken, Jesus answered, 'Who is my mother? Who
are my brothers?' 49 He then stretched out his hand towards his disciples and

said, 'Behold, my mother and my brothers! 50 As it is, whoever does the will of my Father who is in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother.
13 On that day, Jesus went out of the house and sat down by the seaside.
2 Since great crowds had gathered to [listen to] him, he entered into a boat and sat while the people stood on the beach.
3 He told them many things in parables, saying, 'Behold, a farmer went out to sow.

Day 07-Jul-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

St Thomas of Mt Maleon (10th c.)

He was a renowned general, known for his great size and courage, his many victories against barbarian enemies, and his considerable wealth. But, forsaking wealth and reputation to follow Christ, he retired to the desert to live in asceticism. The Prophet Elias appeared to him and, accompanied by a pillar of fire, led him to Mount Maleon, near the Holy Mountain. There he lived in solitude, giving his days and nights to prayer. Like so many who seek to hide their holiness from the world, he was discovered, and people began to come to him for healing of their ailments and those of their loved ones. The saint healed countless ailments, drove out demons, cured the blind, and made water to pour forth from barren earth. In prayer he appeared as a pillar of fire. He reposed in peace, and his relics continued to be a powerful source of healing.

Holy Martyr Kyriake of Nicomedia (289)

During the time of the Emperors Diocletian and his son-in-law Maximian, both adversaries of Christ, there lived in Anatolia two pious and elderly souls, Dorotheus and Eusebia. They were devout Christians, wealthy but childless. Through unceasing prayer, they obtained a child from God – the holy Kyriake. From her childhood, Kyriake consecrated herself to God, abstaining from everything that unruly children do. When she had matured and was beautiful in body and soul, many suitors came to ask for her hand in marriage; but she refused them all, saying that she had betrothed herself to Christ the Lord and desired nothing more than to die as a virgin. One of the rejected suitors denounced Kyriake and her parents to Emperor Diocletian as Christians. The emperor ordered that Kyriake's parents be tortured, and after torturing them, banished them to the town of Melitene – where they died, having endured much suffering for Christ. Diocletian sent Kyriake herself to Maximian to stand trial. Since Kyriake confirmed her faith in Christ before Maximian, he ordered that she be placed on the ground and flogged with bullwhips. After that, the emperor handed her over to the

commanders, first to Hilarion and, after his death, to Apollonius. Both of them tortured Kyriake in a beastly manner, in all possible ways, but all was in vain. When St. Kyriake lay in the prison cell, completely covered with wounds, Christ the Lord appeared to her, healed her, and said: 'Kyriake, do not be afraid of torture; My grace is with thee.' And indeed the grace of Christ saved this martyr from the fire and from the wild beasts, which the godless judges thought would bring about her certain death. Seeing Kyriake miraculously saved from such a death, many pagans came to believe in Christ – and they were all beheaded. Kyriake said to Apollonius: 'In no manner can you turn me away from my Faith. If you throw me into the fire, I have the example of the Three Youths; if you throw me before wild beasts, I have the example of Daniel the Prophet; if you toss me into the sea, I have the example of Jonah the Prophet; if you give me over to the sword, I will remember the honorable Forerunner. Life, for me, is to die for Christ.' Then Apollonius ordered that Kyriake be beheaded. Kyriake knelt down, raised her hands to heaven, and prayed to God, that He would save and have mercy on all those who would celebrate her memory, and that he would give rest to her soul together with the souls of her parents. Upon completing her prayer, she rendered her soul to God, before the sword was lowered onto her neck. Kyriake suffered honorably in Nicomedia, and she was received into eternal joy, in the year 289.

Kontakion

The Martyr of Christ hath called us all together now to praise and acclaim her wrestlings and her godly feats; for possessed of manliness of mind, she hath proved to be worthy of her name, being lady and mistress of her mind and the passions of unseemliness.

Note: St Kyriake is also known as Dominica or Nedelja, Latin and Slavonic words for 'Sunday'.

Day 07-Jul-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Romans 16:1-16; Matthew 13:4-9
16 Greetings I commend to you Phoebe, our sister, who is a servant of the Church
that is at Cenchrea, 2so that you receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the
saints.
Also, may you assist her in whatever matter she may need from you since she has
been a benefactor to many, including myself.
3 Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow-workers in Christ Jesus, 4 who risked their
own lives for my sake.
I am grateful to them, and with me all the Churches of the Gentiles.
5 Greet the Church that is in their house and Epaenetus, my beloved, who is the
first fruits of Achaia to Christ.
6 Greet Mary, who labored much for us.
7 Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives and fellow-prisoners who are
outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.
8 Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord.
9 Greet Urbanus, our fellow-worker in Christ, and Stachys, my beloved.
10 Greet Apelles, the approved in Christ.
Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus.
11 Greet Herodion, my relative.
Greet those of the household of Narcissus, who are in the Lord.
12 Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, who work hard in the Lord.
Greet Persis, the beloved, who has labored much in the Lord.
13 Greet Rufus, the chosen in the Lord, and his mother, a mother to me as well.
14 Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brethren who
are with them.
15 Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, Olympas, and all the saints
who are with them.
16 Greet one another with a holy kiss.
The Churches of Christ greet you.
Gospel reading:

4 As he sowed, some seeds fell by the roadside, and the birds came and devoured
them.
5 Others fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately
they sprang up.
But because they had no depth of soil, 6 when the sun rose, they were [quickly]

scorched, and since they had no root, they withered away.
7 Others fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them.
8 Others fell on good soil, and yielded fruit: some a hundred times as much, some sixty, and some thirty.
9 Anyone who has ears should listen!'

Day 08-Jul-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Appearance of the "Kazan" icon of the Most Holy Theotokos (1579)

"In Kazan, in 1579, the nine-year old Matrona, whose parents' home had burned down in a fire, had a dream in which she beheld an icon of the Theotokos and heard a voice commanding her to recover this icon from the ashes of the ruined house. The icon was found wrapped in an old piece of cloth under the stove, where it may have been hidden during the Tartar invasions. The icon was finally brought to the Cathedral of the Annunciation of the Theotokos, where it became renowned for the healings that the Mother of God wrought through it for the blind... The icon of Kazan is one of the most beloved icons of the Mother of God in Russia." (Great Horologion)

† Holy Great Martyr Prokopios (303)

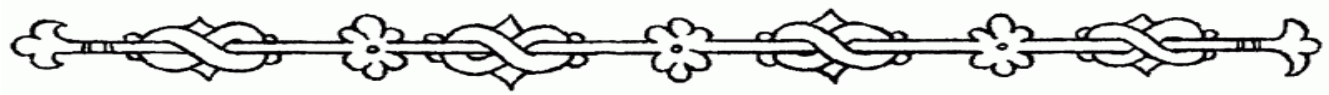
"He was born in Jerusalem of a Christian father and a pagan mother, at first bearing the name Neanias. After his father's death, his mother brought him up entirely in the spirit of Roman idolatry. When he had grown up, the Emperor Diocletian saw him at some time and was so pleased with him that he took him to court to serve in the army. When this wicked Emperor launched a persecution of Christians, he ordered Neanias to go with a detachment of soldiers to Alexandria and exterminate the Christians there. But, on the road, there happened to Neanias something similar to that which happened to Saul. At three o'clock in the morning there was a violent earthquake, the Lord Jesus appearing to him and saying: 'Neanias, where are you going, and against whom are you rebelling?' In great fear, Neanias replied: 'Who are you, Lord? I cannot recognise You.' Then a brilliant Cross, as of crystal, appeared in the sky and a voice came from the Cross: 'I am Jesus, the crucified Son of God.' The Lord went on: 'By this sign that you have seen, overcome your enemies, and My peace will be with you.' This event utterly changed Neanias's life. He caused a cross such as he had seen to be made, and, instead of moving against the Christians, set off with his soldiers against the Agarians, who were attacking Jerusalem. He entered Jerusalem victorious and told his mother that he was a Christian. Brought to trial, he took off his army belt and sword and cast them

before the judge, demonstrating by this that he was a soldier only of Christ the King. After harsh torture, he was thrown into prison. There Christ the Lord appeared to him again, baptising him and giving him the name Procopius. One day twelve women came to the window of his cell and said to him: 'We also are the servants of Christ.' Arrested for this, they were thrown into the same prison, where St Procopius instructed them in the Christian faith and carefully prepared them to receive the crown of martyrdom. These twelve women were then harshly tortured. Beholding their sufferings and courage, Procopius's mother also came to faith in Christ, and then all thirteen were put to death. When St Procopius was led to the scaffold, he raised his hands towards the East and prayed to God for all the poor and needy, the destitute and the widowed, and especially for the holy Church, that it might grow and spread and that Orthodoxy might shine to the end of time. He was assured from heaven that his prayer was heard, after which he joyfully laid his head under the sword and went to his Lord, to eternal joy. St Procopius suffered with honour in Palestinian Caesarea, and was crowned with an eternal wreath of glory, on July 8th, 303." (Prologue)

St Procopius, Fool for Christ (1303)

He was a prominent merchant of German origin. Visiting Novgorod on business, he was so moved by the beauty of Orthodoxy that he embraced the Orthodox faith. Seeking to follow Christ more fully, he gave away all his goods to the poor and lived as an indigent, giving his life to prayer and asceticism but feigning madness to avoid the praise of men. He was granted the gifts of prescience and of insight into the hearts of others: he would often speak to those who came to him of their secret sins, and several times he predicted natural disasters. Once he stopped a deadly hailstorm in town of Ustiug through his fervent prayers before the icon of the Mother of God. He was found dead on the road, covered with snow; a church was built over his relics, which worked many wonders.

Venerable Theophilus the Myrrh-gusher



Day 08-Jul-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Romans 8:14-21; Matthew 9:9-13

14 As many as are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.
15 You did not receive the spirit of bondage to [live in] fear again.
Instead, you received the Spirit of adoption through which we cry, 'Abba!b Father!'
Adopted as children of God: hope of glory 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God; 17 and if [we are] children, then [we are] heirs; heirs of God, and join theirs with Christ; if indeed we suffer with him, so that we may also be glorified with him.
18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which will be revealed toward us.
19 As it is, the creation waits with eager expectation for the revelation of God's children.
20 Indeed, creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21that creation will also be delivered from the bondage of decay into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

Gospel Reading:

9 As Jesus was passing by from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax collection office.
Jesus said to him, 'Follow me,' and the man got up and began to follow him.
10 It so happened that as Jesus was sitting in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came [in] and sat down with Jesus and his disciples.
11 When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?' 12 When Jesus heard it, he told them, 'Those who are healthy have no need for a physician, but those who are sick do.
13 But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,'b for I did not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.

Day 09-Jul-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Hieromartyr Pancratius, bishop of Taormina in Sicily (1st c.)

He was born in Antioch during the years that Christ walked in the flesh in Palestine. His parents, hearing of Christ's miracles and teaching, journeyed to Jerusalem, bringing their young son Pancratius. There all three of them saw and listened to Jesus Himself, and met the disciple Peter as well. After the Ascension, Pancratius and his parents were baptised in Antioch (some accounts say by the Apostle Peter himself). The Apostle Peter installed Pancratius as bishop of Taormina in Sicily, where he worked great wonders and brought many to Christ.

A pagan general named Aquilinus, hearing that Taormina had become Christian, set out with his army to destroy the town. Pancratius instructed the faithful not to fear and went out to confront the army, armed only with the sign of the Cross. When the army came near the town, the soldiers were seized with confusion and fear, fell on their own weapons and attacked one another, and finally withdrew in terror. Thus the city was saved by the prayers of the holy bishop. Later, pagans stoned him to death, granting him a martyr's end. His relics may still be venerated in Rome.

Dionysios the Orator

Venerable Martyrs Patermuthius and Copres

Day 09-Jul-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Sunday healing of two Gadarene demon-possessed men
Romans 10:1-10; Matthew 8:28-9:1
10 1 Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God are for Israel, that they may be saved.
2 Certainly, I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not according to accurate knowledge.
3 Being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.
4 For Christ is the fulfillment of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.
5 Moses writes about the righteousness of the law, 'The one who does them will live by them.
6 But the righteousness which is of faith speaks this way, 'Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down); 7 or, 'Who will descend into the abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead.
)' 8 But what does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth, and in your heart;' that is, the word of faith, which we preach.
9 If you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.
10 With the heart, one believes, resulting in righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made, resulting in salvation.

Gospel Reading: Sunday healing of two Gadarene demon-possessed men

28 When Jesus arrived on the other side, into the country of the Gergesenes, two men possessed by demons met him there, coming out of the tombs.
They were extremely violent, so much that nobody could pass that way.
29 Behold, they cried out, saying, 'What do we have to do with you, Jesus, Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?' 30 Now, there was a herd of many pigs feeding at some distance from them.
31 The demons begged him, saying, 'If you cast us out, allow us to go away into the herd of pigs.
32 He said to them, 'Go!' The demons came out and went into the herd of pigs: and behold, the whole herd of pigs rushed down the cliff into the sea and died in the water.

33 Those who fed them fled and went into the city where they told everything, including what had happened to those who were possessed with demons.
34 Behold, the entire city came out to meet Jesus. When they saw him, they begged that he would depart from their borders.
Jesus entered into a boat, crossed over [the lake] and came into his own town

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING
It is very common in our times to hear of people having 'supernatural" experiences, of seeing spirits or even ghosts of their dearly departed.
There is a certain enthusiasm, an emotional connection with these phenomena. Some are borne of grief, others of guilt, and it is very easy for people who follow these 'signs and wonders" to trust in these experiences.
Indeed, it is not difficult to see why.
These experiences may seem to be immediate, personal and deceptively real, a far cry from our relationship with Christ and His Church, which, due to the fact that they require a lot more concentration, hard work and above all, humility, can seem like a rather dull and dry affair.
Such is the situation in which we find ourselves today.
The demons who had possessed these two men wished to inspire the belief that the souls of those who had died became ghosts, phantoms.
We Orthodox Christians should in no way believe this, for when the soul departs from the body it does not wander the earth, free from the body; neither does it possess, nor speak to certain 'special" or 'spiritually aware" people.
Rather, as Holy Scripture makes quite clear in the gospel of John, the souls of the righteous are taken into the resurrection of Life, whereas the souls of the sinners are taken to the resurrection of Judgement.
For the demons, Jesus' arrival is untimely.
He has spoiled their entertaining.
Though they knew that their time on earth is fleeting and that God will come to judge them, they complain that he has 'come before the time".
This complaint should not surprise us, for though they know the game is up, in their deceptiveness they still have the audacity to ask 'what have you to do with

us?' Our modern life tends to try and push a dualistic 'ying-yang" approach vis-a-vis good and evil.
Here we see the truth: that the demons do not have any authority over us unless we give it to them, but that they even have to ask for permission to enter the herd of swine.
This makes the reaction of the townspeople all the more tragic.
Faced with the delusion of their 'happy little lives", with the hard evidence of the healing of the former demoniacs, and consequently the realisation that to be truly free of superstition and sin they would have to change their ways and turn back to God (the literal meaning of repentance, 'metanoia", is a changing of mind or approach), they become afraid, and ask Christ, the King of all, to leave.
Let us take warning from their rejection, not to put our trust in an easy care-free life, in false spirituality or narrow mindedness.
Rather, let us take the difficult and narrow path, to turn back to God and enter into a deeper relationship with Him, our Christ, and to amend our ways without fear, judgement or self-condemnation.
DO DEMONS REALLY HAVE ANY POWER? 'Let us not be deceived by the demons who do all things in deceit, even to frightening us with death.
For they are weak and can do nothing but threaten…The demons have no power, but are like actors on the stage, changing their shapes and frightening children with disruptive apparitions in various forms, for which they ought to be mocked as showing their impotence…" St Anthony the Great

Day 10-Jul-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy 45 Martyrs of Nikopolis in Armenia (319)

During a persecution of Christians in the reign of the Emperor Licinius, Leontius and several of his companions came before the Imperial governor in Nikopolis of Armenia, and declared themselves as Christians. They were whipped and thrown into prison, where they were given no food or drink; but a Christian noblewoman secretly brought them water, and an angel of the Lord appeared to them in their cell to comfort them. Such was the power of their faith that, at their trial, two of their jailers proclaimed their conversion to Christianity. Many others came forward in the same way, until the company of Christians numbered forty-five in all. The judge ordered that they all have their arms and legs hacked off and that they then be burned to death.

† St Anthony of the Kiev Caves (1073)

He is honored as the founder of Orthodox monastic life in Russia. He was born in Chernigov province and tonsured at the Monastery of Esphigmenou on the Holy Mountain. His abbot sent him from Mt Athos to Kiev to establish the monastic life there in 1013, during the last years of Prince Vladimir's holy reign. He lived there as a hermit, slowly drawing to himself others who wished to share the ascetical life. In time, the brotherhood grew into the Kiev Caves Lavra. St Anthony refused to serve as abbot of the monastery; this task was taken up by St Theodosius (commemorated May 3). St Anthony continued to live as a cave-dwelling hermit and reposed in peace at the age of ninety.

The Placing of the Precious Robe of the Lord in Moscow (1625)

Elias, a soldier in the Roman army in Jerusalem, was a Georgian by birth, from the town of Mtskhet. When the Lord was crucified, his garments were divided by lot among the soldiers, a his robe fell to Elias, who took it home to Georgia and gave it as a gift to his sister Sidonia. The robe was buried with her, then miraculously found many years later by St Nina (January 14). King Mirian, who had accepted Christ in response to St Nina's teaching, built a church to the Holy Apostles on the spot where the robe was found. Many years later, Georgia was conquered by the Persians, and the robe fell into their hands. In 1625 the Persian Shah Abbas, wishing to establish good relations with Russia, sent the robe to Moscow as a gift to Prince Michael Feodorovich and Patriarch Philaret. It was placed with honor in the Cathedral of the Dormition.

Holy Father Gregory, Bishop of Assa

Day 10-Jul-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Romans 16:17-24; Matthew 13:10-23
17 Now I beg you, brethren, watch out for those who are causing divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which you learned.
Stay away from them! 18 Such people do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly.
By their smooth and flattering speech, they deceive the hearts of the innocent.
19 Indeed, your obedience has become known to all and I rejoice over you.
I desire to have you wise in what is good, but innocent in what is evil,a 20 and the God of peace will quickly crush Satan under your feet.
May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you! 21Timothy, my fellow-worker, greets you, as do Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my relatives.
22 I, Tertius, who write the letter, greet you in the Lord.
23 Gaius, my host and host of the whole Church,c greets you.
Erastus, the treasurer of the city, greets you, as does Quartus, the brother.
24 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all! Amen.
25

Gospel Reading:
10 The disciples came and asked him, 'Why do you speak to them in parables?' 11 He answered them, 'To you, it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but to them, it is not given.
12 Anyone who has will be given more and will have in abundance; but the one who does not have will be deprived even of what he has.
13 Therefore, I speak to them in parables, because 'seeing, they do not see,' and 'hearing, they do not hear,' and neither do they understand.
14 In them, the prophecy of Isaias (Isaiah) is fulfilled, which says: By hearing you will hear, and will in no way understand;a Seeing you will see, and will in no way perceive: for this people's heart has grown callous; their ears are dull of hearing, they have closed their eyes; otherwise, they might perhaps perceive with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their heart, and should turn again; and I would heal them.
a 16 But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and [blessed are] your ears, because they hear! 17 Amen, I tell you that many among the prophets and the righteous desired to see what you see and they did not see them; and to hear what you hear, and [yet they] did not hear them.

18 Hear, then, the parable of the farmer.
19 When someone hears the word of the Kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in this person's heart. This is what was sown by the roadside.
20 The seed sown on the rocky places is when someone hears the word and immediately receives it with joy.
21Yet, this person has no root but endures only for a while.
When oppression or persecution comes because of the word, this one immediately stumbles.
22 What was sown among the thorns is when someone hears the word, but the anxieties of this age and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and so it produces nothing.
23 What was sown on the good ground is when someone hears the word, understands it, and truly bears fruit, bringing forth, some a hundred times as much, some sixty, and some thirty times as much.

Day 11-Jul-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Commemoration of the Miracle (451) of Great-martyr Euphemia the All-praised, of Chalcedon (304)

St Euphemia is commemorated on September 16; today we commemorate the miracle wrought by her relics during the Fourth Ecumenical Council. After much debate and no progress among the defenders of Orthodoxy and the proponents of the Monophysite heresy, the two parties agreed each to write their different definitions of the Faith in two separate books, and to ask God to show them the truth. They placed the two books in the case containing St Euphemia's relics, sealed the case, and departed. After three days of constant vigil and supplication, they opened the reliquary in the presence of the Emperor, and found the Monophysite book under the feet of the Saint, and the Orthodox book in her right hand.

Blessed Equal-to-the-Apostles Olga, princess of Russia, in holy baptism called Helen (969).

"Saint Olga, renowned for her wisdom and sobriety, in her youth became the wife of Igor, Great Prince of Kiev, who ruled during the tenth century. After her husband's death, she herself ruled capably, and was finally moved to accept the Faith of Christ. She travelled to Constantinople to receive Holy Baptism. The Emperor, seeing her outward beauty and inward greatness, asked her to marry him. She said she could not do this before she was baptized; she furthermore asked him to be her Godfather at the font, which he agreed to do. After she was baptized (receiving the name of Helen), the Emperor repeated his proposal of marriage. She answered that now he was her father, through Holy Baptism, and that not even among the heathen was it heard of a man marrying his daughter. Gracefully accepting to be outwitted by her, he sent her back to her land with priests and sacred texts and holy icons. Although her son Svyatoslav remained a pagan, she planted the seed of faith in her grandson Vladimir (see July 15). She reposed in peace in 969." (Great Horologion)

New Martyrs Nikodemos (1722) and Nektarios (1820)
These two martyrs were unrelated, but their stories are similar. Both were Christians who embraced Islam at an early age under the Turks. Both later repented and, after doing penance, resolved to return to the place of their apostasy and accept martyrdom. Both presented themselves to the Turks, proclaimed their Christian faith, and were beheaded according to Islamic law.

Saint Nikodemos not only embraced Islam, but forced his family to do the same. One of his sons fled to the Holy Mountain and became a monk. The father pursued him there, but was moved to repentance by the holiness of the place and became a monk himself. After three years of penance, he resolved to return home to Albania and embrace his martyrdom.

Saint Nektarios converted to Islam (the Prologue says under duress) at the age of seventeen. When his mother saw him dressed as a Turk, she cried "Get away from me! I do not know you. I bore you as a Christian, not a Turk!" Repenting of his deed he went to the Holy Mountain and became a monk. Like St Nikodemos, he determined after a few years to return home and accept martyrdom for Christ.

St Sophrony of Essex (1993) (June 28 OC)

He was born in Russia in 1896. As a young man, he lived an artist's life, trying to succeed as a painter while engaging in a wide-ranging spiritual search which included study of the Eastern religions. He fled to Paris during the Russian Revolution. There he rediscovered the Orthodoxy of his childhood and gave his life wholly to repentance and prayer, often spending hours at a time prostrated and weeping on the floor of his Paris apartment. In 1925 he moved to Mt Athos, where he lived as a monk for more than twenty years. On the Holy Mountain he became the spiritual child of the holy elder Silouan. After St Silouan's repose, his own health badly damaged by living in a damp cave, he was granted permission by his monastery to leave the Holy Mountain and write a life of St Silouan. This is St Silouan of Mt Athos, a great spiritual treasure which includes the writings of the Saint as well as Fr Sophrony's profound reflections on his life. (It was largely through Fr Sophrony's work that St Silouan, who lived an almost completely hidden life, was glorified by the Church).

In 1959 Fr Sophrony founded the Monastery of St John the Baptist in Essex, England, where he lived until his repose. He was a spiritual father to Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpakthos, one of present-day Orthodoxy's most profound spiritual writers, who has said this about him: "I ascertained from

almost the first meeting... that Father Sophrony was a Theologian of our Church, a God-seer. I realized, that is, that the Elder had seen the Uncreated Light... I had discerned that he was truly a God-seer, because otherwise his whole life, his whole demeanor, the words he said, the counsels, and in any case his whole personality, could not be justified. He was literally altered by the uncreated Grace of God." At Essex, he was known as spiritual father to many and (little publicized) as a wonderworker and intercessor. He reposed in peace in 1993. In 2019 He was formally glorified as a Saint of the Church by the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Any who wish to drink from the deep well of his teaching can read (in addition to St Silouan) his books On Prayer and We Shall See Him As He Is.

"Any and every dogmatic error will inevitably reflect on one's spiritual life." — Elder Sophrony

Day 11-Jul-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9; Matthew 13:24-30

1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,
2 to the Church of God which is at Corinth.
[You are] those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all those who call upon the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, both theirs and ours:
3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
4 I always give thanks to my God concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you in Christ Jesus; 5 that in everything you have been enriched in him, in all [manner of] speech and knowledge; 6 even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you.
7 And so, you lack no gift as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ;
8 who will also confirm you until the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.
9 God is faithful, through whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Gospel Reading:

24 He also presented them another parable in these words, 'The Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field.
25 While people slept, his enemy came and also sowed weed grass among the wheat, and went away.
26 But when the wheat sprang up and brought forth fruit, the weeds also appeared.
27 The servants of the householder came [forward] and said to him, 'Sir,c did you not sow good seed in your field? Where did this darnel come from?' 28 The man said to them, 'An enemy has done this.
The servants then asked him, 'Do you want us to go and gather them up?'
29 But the man replied, 'No, for fear that while you gather up the darnel weeds, you might also uproot the wheat along with them.
30 Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of the harvest I will tell the reapers: 'First, gather up the darnel weeds, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn.

Day 12-Jul-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Martyrs Proclus and Hilarius (2nd c.)

Proclus was the uncle of Hilarius; both were from Kallippi in Asia during the reign of Trajan. When Proclus was brought to be tried as a Christian, the judge asked him 'Of what race are you?' Proclus answered 'I am of the race of Christ, and my hope is in my God.' When the judge threatened to torture him, he said 'When you are afraid to transgress the Emperor's commands and risk falling into temporal punishment, how much more do we Christians fear to transgress against God's commands and fall into eternal torment!' When Proclus was given over to torture, his nephew Hilarius came forward and proclaimed 'I too am a Christian.' After torture, both were condemned to death; Proclus was crucified and Hilarius beheaded.

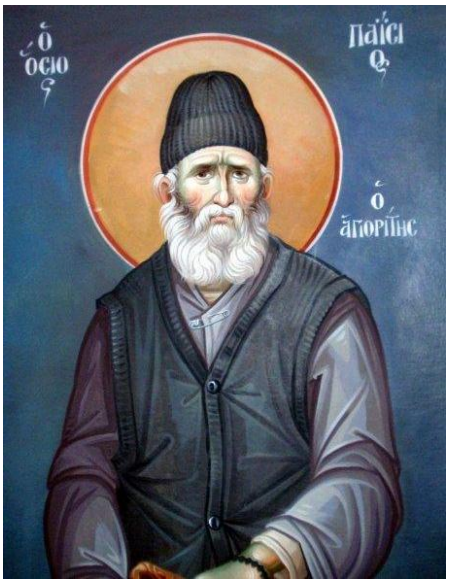
Imagine how the Orthodox Church would benefit if, when we were asked 'Of what race are you?' the first answer that came to mind was not 'I am Greek, Russian, Serbian...' but 'I am of the race of Christ!'

St Veronica, the woman with the issue of blood who was healed by the Savior

See Matthew ch. 9, Mark ch. 5, and Luke ch. 8. After the events told in the Gospel, she spent the remainder of her life as a follower of Christ and reposed in peace.

Saint Païsios of the Holy Mountain (1994) (June 29 OC)

'The future Elder Paisius was born in 1924 and baptized by St. Arsenius of Cappadocia. He spent his youth as a carpenter until WW II, during which he repeatedly distinguished himself in the army by his bravery and self-sacrifice. In 1950 he went to Mt. Athos for eight years, where he was tonsured. Then he was asked to spend some time in his home village of Epirus, in order to defend the faithful against Protestant proselytism. He returned to Mt. Athos in 1964 and stayed in several monasteries, eventually settling in the Panagouda hermitage of Koutloumousiou Monastery, where he remained for fifteen years. Here his reputation as a holy elder and guide grew, and he tirelessly received those thirsting for spiritual direction, allowing himself only two or three hours of sleep each day. He reposed in 1994, one of the most well-known and beloved



contemporary elders. Many of his counsels and other writings have been published.' (St Herman Calendar, 1994)

Elder Païsios was glorified by the Church in 2015; he is commemorated on the anniversary of his repose.

Venerable Michael of Maleinos
Holy Martyr Golinduc
Holy Martyrs Theodore and John

Day 12-Jul-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 2:9-3:8; Matthew 13:31-36
9 But as it is written: Things which an eye did not see, and an ear did not hear,
Which did not enter into the heart of man, These God has prepared for those who love him.
10 Yet, God has revealed these things to us through the Spirit, because the Spirit searches all things, yes, [even] the deep things of God.
11 For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? Likewise, no one truly comprehends the things of God except the Spirit of God.
12 However, we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, so that we might know the things that were freely given to us by God.
13 These are the things we proclaim, not in words which human wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with [other] spiritual things.
14 Now, the natural person does not receive the things of God's Spirit because for they are foolishness to him, and such a person cannot know these things because they are spiritually discerned.
15 On the other hand, the spiritual person discerns all things and is not subject to mere human opinions.
16 'Truly, who has known the mind of the Lord to [be in position to] instruct him?'k
But we have the mind of Christ!
3 God's co-workers – Spiritual living Brethren, I could not speak to you as to spiritual persons, but as to carnal ones- infants in Christ.
2 I fed you with milk, not with meat, because you were not yet ready.
Indeed, you are not even ready now 3because you are still carnal.
As long as there is jealousy, strife, and factions among you, are you not carnal, walking according to human ways?
4 When one says, 'I follow Paul,' and another, 'I follow Apollos,' are you not carnal?
5 Who then is Apollos, and who is Paul, if not servants through whom you believed; and each as the Lord gave to him?
6 I planted, Apollos watered, but [it is] God [who] made it grow!
7 And so, neither the one planting nor the one watering is anything: only God makes it grow.
8 Now the one planting and the one watering are the same, but each will receive a personal reward according to his own labor.

Gospel Reading:
31 Jesus also presented another parable to them, saying, 'The Kingdom of Heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field.
32 It is indeed smaller than all [other] seeds, but when it is grown, it is the biggest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air can come and find shelter in its branches.
33 He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour, until it was all leavened.
34 Jesus spoke all these things in parables to the crowds; and he did not speak to them without a parable,
35 so that that had been spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled: I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden from the foundation of the world.
36 Then Jesus sent the multitudes away and went into the house.
His disciples came to him, saying, 'Explain to us the parable of the grass weeds of the field.

Day 13-Jul-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Synaxis of the Holy Archangel Gabriel

On this day all the many visitations and miracles of the holy Archangel, recorded in Holy Scripture and ever since, are commemorated. This feast duplicates the Synaxis of the Archangel Gabriel that is celebrated on March 26, the day after Annunciation; it is thought that it was added to the calendar here some time in the ninth century, so that it could be celebrated more festively outside of Great Lent.

Holy Martyr Golinduc of Persia (6th c.)

She was a Persian noblewoman during the reign of Chosroës II (590-628). Through a vision of an angel, she came to belief in Christ and received holy baptism; her name in baptism was Maria. Her furious husband reported her to King Chosroës, who had her thrown into a foul dungeon known as Oblivion for eighteen years. During these years she was repeatedly told to renounce Christ and was tormented in many ways. She was thrown to venomous snakes, which refused to harm her. Some lawless young men were sent to her cell to defile her, but God made her invisible to them. Many Persians, amazed and inspired by her patient sufferings, accepted Christ. She was finally set free through the visitation of an angel, traveled to Jerusalem and Constantinople, and reposed in peace.

She is commemorated July 12 on the Slavic calendar. Oddly, she is called a Martyr in all accounts, though she died free and in peace; presumably her eighteen years of cruel imprisonment earned her the title.

Saint Julian, Bishop of Cenomanis (Le Mans) (1st c.)

He was made bishop by the Apostle Peter and sent to Gaul as a missionary. Some believe that he was Simon the Leper, whom the Lord healed, later named Julian in Baptism. In Gaul, despite great difficulty and privation, he converted many to faith in Christ and worked many miracles — healing the sick, driving out demons, and even raising the dead. In time the local prince, Defenson, was baptised along with many of his subjects. He reposed in peace.

Repose of Photios Kontoglou (1965) (June 30 OC)

He is called "Blessed Photios" by many, but has not yet been officially glorified. In the twentieth century, he almost singlehandedly restored the practice of true Byzantine iconography to the Church. He was born in 1895 in one of the many Greek towns of Asia Minor. He and his family fled to Greece during the "exchange of populations" of 1923, when more than a million

Greeks were driven from Turkey and resettled in Greece. He studied to be a secular artist, but was increasingly drawn to Byzantine iconography, the practice of which had almost disappeared: he learned the iconographic ethos and technique by copying ancient models and studying with the few monks on the Holy Mountain who still practiced true iconography. Initially his work was scorned, since secular western standards had come to dominate even the art of the Church. Slowly, through his tireless labors, an understanding of Orthodoxy iconography was restored to the Church, not only in Greece, but throughout the world. Though married, he lived his life in poverty, often donating his work to churches or performing it for nominal fees. His deeply spiritual writings are greatly honored in Greece, though most remain untranslated into English.

Venerable Stephen of Saint Sava's

Day 13-Jul-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 3:18-23; Matthew 13:36-43

18 Let no one deceive himself: if anyone thinks that he is wise among you in this world, let him become a fool, so that he may become wise.
19 Indeed, the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God! As it is written, 'He has taken the wise in their craftiness.
c 20 And also, 'The Lord knows the reasoning of the wise, that it is worthless.
d 21Therefore, let no one boast in human beings! All things are yours, 22 whether Paul, or Apollos, or Kephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come.
All belong to you, 23 and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

Gospel Reading:

36 Then Jesus sent the multitudes away and went into the house.
His disciples came to him, saying, 'Explain to us the parable of the grass weeds of the field.
37 He answered them, 'The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man.
38 The field is the world, the good seed the children of the Kingdom and the darnel weeds are the children of the evil one.
39 The enemy who sowed them is the devil.
The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels.
40 As the weeds are gathered up and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of this age.
41 The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will gather out of his Kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and those who do evil, 42 and he will cast them into the furnace of fire.
There will be weeping and the gnashing of teeth.
43 Then the righteous will shine forth like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father.
Anyone who has ears should listen!

Day 14-Jul-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Apostle Aquila of the Seventy, and St Priscilla (1st c.).

He, along with his wife Priscilla, is mentioned in the book of Acts and in St Paul's Epistle to the Romans. He and his wife were Jews who moved to Corinth when the Emperor Claudius expelled all Jews from Italy. They were working as tentmakers in Corinth when they met and worked with St Paul, also a tentmaker by trade, who brought them to faith in Christ. From that time onward they worked diligently to spread the Gospel of Christ. The Prologue says that they died at the hands of pagans, the Great Horologion that the circumstances of their repose are unknown.

Our Father among the Saints Joseph, Archbishop of Thessalonika (833)

He was the brother of St Theodore the Studite (November 11), and is also sometimes called Studite. He is one of the inspired composers of the canons in the Lenten Triodion, many of which bear the title "by Joseph". (He should not be confused with St Joseph the Hymnographer, who is commemorated April 3.) As Archbishop of Thessalonika, he suffered greatly for his zealous defense of the holy icons: he was imprisoned, and was exiled three times.

St Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain, spiritual writer (1809)

He is best known for his collections of Orthodox writings, most importantly the Philokalia, a five-volume compendium of writings on asceticism and prayer, especially the Jesus Prayer, by the holy Fathers of the Church. (The first four volumes have been translated into English). He produced an Orthodox edition of Unseen Warfare, originally by Lorenzo Scupoli, a Roman Catholic. (This was further revised by St Theophan the Recluse). He also edited the Pedalion (Rudder), a collection of the canons of the Orthodox Church with his commentary.

Note: The English edition of the Rudder needs to be read with care, since it includes additional comments by the translator, not clearly distinguished from those of the Saint.

Joseph the Confessor

Venerable Hellius

Day 14-Jul-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 4:5-8; Matthew 13:44-54
5 Therefore, judge nothing before the time, [that is] until the Lord comes.
He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the motives of every heart.
Then, each person will receive due praise from God.
6 Brethren, I have figuratively applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that in us you might learn the meaning of 'not beyond the things which are written,' so that none of you will be puffed up against another.
7 Indeed, who makes you different?b And what do you have that you have not received? But if you received it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? 8 [But] you are already filled! You have already become rich and you have come to rule apart from us! Yes, and I wish that you would really be rulers, so that we also might reign with you.
Gospel reading:

44 The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field.
When a man found it, he hid it again.
In his joy, he then goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field! 45 The Kingdom of Heaven is also like a man who is a merchant seeking fine pearls.
46 Having found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.
47 The Kingdom of Heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea which gathered fish of every kind.
48 When the net was filled, people drew it up on the beach.
They sat down and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away.
49 This is how it will be at the end of the age: the angels will come forth and separate the wicked from the righteous; 50 they will cast them into the furnace of fire where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
51 Jesus asked them, 'Have you understood all these things?' They answered him, 'Yes, Lord.
52 He said to them, 'Therefore, every trained persona who has been made a disciple in the Kingdom of Heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new and old things.
53 When Jesus had finished [speaking] these parables, he departed from there.
54 Coming into his own country, he taught the people in their synagogue and they

were astonished, saying, 'Where did this man get this wisdom and these deeds of power?

Day 15-Jul-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Holy Equal-to-the-Apostles Great Prince Vladimir (in holy baptism Basil), enlightener of the Russian Land (1051)

Though his grandmother, Queen Olga, had been a Christian, his father Svyatoslav reverted to paganism, and Prince Vladimir spent the early part of his life believing and living the beliefs of the pagan Russian people. But he sought for something more, and sent emissaries to study the faiths of the Jews, the Muslims, the Western Christians and the Orthodox. After attending services in Agia Sophia in Constantinople, they told him 'We knew not if we were on earth or in heaven,' and Prince Vladimir determined to embrace the Christian faith. He was baptised in Cherson in 988, receiving the name Basil. "He came forth from the font not only healed of a blindness lately afflicting him, but also from being passionate and warlike, he became meek, peaceable, and exceedingly godly." (Great Horologion). He married Princess Anna, sister of the Emperor, and returned home with a retinue of priests from Constantinople. He immediately set about building a Christian nation: casting down the idols, baptizing the people, and establishing a Christian government. His legislation for his recently barbarian nation was modeled on the Gospel, and in its conformity to Christ's commandments exceeded even the other Christian nations of the time. He reposed in peace in 1015, leaving behind a kingdom that grew to be the largest Orthodox nation in the world.

Holy Martyrs Cyricus and His Mother Julitta (304)

"Holy Julitta was of noble birth. She was widowed young, and left with a newborn child, Cyricus. She lived in Iconium, a city of Lycaonia, and was a very devout Christian. She had her son baptised immediately after his birth and, when he was three years old, instructed him in the Faith and taught him to pray insofar as a child of that age is capable of learning. When Diocletian launched a persecution of Christians, much innocent blood was shed in the city of Iconium. Julitta took her son and hid from the wrath of the pagans in the town of Seleucid, but things were no better there. Julitta was arrested as a Christian and brought to trial. Seeing Julitta so courageously proclaim her faith in the Lord Jesus, the judge, to distress her and make her waver, took the child in his arms and began to kiss it. But Cyricus shouted: 'I am a Christian; let me go to

my mother!', and he began to scratch the judge, turning his face away from him. The judge was furious, threw the child to the ground and kicked it, and the child rolled down the stone steps and gave his holy and innocent soul to God. Seeing how Cyricus suffered before her, Julitta was filled with joy and gave thanks to God that her son had been counted worthy of the wreath of martyrdom. After harsh torture, Julitta was beheaded, in the year 304. The relics of Ss Cyricus and Julitta have wonderworking power to this day. A part of the relics of these saints is to be found in Ochrid, in the Church of the Holy Mother of God, the Healer." (Prologue. In the Prologue, the name of Cyricus is spelled "Cerycus." It is changed here for consistency with other sources.)

Day 15-Jul-2023 Saturday

Fast Free
Readings of the day: Romans 9:1-5; Matthew 9:18-26
9 Paul's sorrow for Israel's unbelief – God's sovereign mercy I tell the truth in Christ.
I am not lying and my conscience bears witness with me in the Holy Spirit 2 that I have great sorrow and unceasing pain in my heart.
3 In fact, I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my relatives according to the flesh, 4who are Israelites.
Theirs is the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the offering of divine service,a and the promises.
5From them are the fathers and Christ according to the flesh who is over all: God blessed forever.
Amen.

Gospel Reading:

18 While he was saying these things to them, behold, a ruler came and expressed adoration toe him, saying, 'My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.
9 Jesus got up and followed him, as did his disciples.
20 Behold, a woman who had had an issue of blood for twelve years came behind him and touched the fringe of his garment.
21 [She did this because] she said within herself, 'If I only touch his garment, I will be made well.
22 But Jesus, turning around and seeing her, said, 'Daughter, rejoice! Your faith has made you well.
And the woman was made well from that very hour.
23 When Jesus came into the ruler's house, he saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion.
24 He said to them, 'Make room, because the girl is not dead, but sleeping,' and they started to ridicule him.
25 But when the crowd was put out, he entered in, took the girl by the hand and she arose.
26 The report of this spread into the entire region.

Day 16-Jul-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Hieromartyr Athenogenes, bishop of Sebaste, and his ten disciples (311)

"In the time of Diocletian, a fierce persecutor of Christians called Philomarchus came to Sebaste. He arrested and killed many Christians in the town. When he saw Athenogenes and his disciples, he told the elder to sacrifice to the idols, that they should not perish as had the other Christians. Athenogenes replied: 'O Torturer, those whom you describe as having perished have not perished, but are in heaven and make merry with the angels!' There was a touching moment when a deer, which had been hand-fed by the compassionate Athenogenes, ran up to him and, seeing him in such straits, shed tears. Wild animals of the hills had more pity on the martyrs than did the pagans! After harsh torture, during which an angel of God comforted them, they were all beheaded, first the priests and fellow workers of Athenogenes and then Athenogenes himself, and went to their heavenly home in the year 311." (Prologue)

The Great Horologion adds "There is a second Martyr Athenogenes commemorated today, mentioned by St Basil... it is said that as this Athenogenes approached the fire, wherein he was to die a martyric death, he chanted the hymn O Joyous Light in praise of the Holy Trinity." This is one way that we know that the vesperal hymn Gladsome Light was in use before the time of St Basil the Great.

Holy Martyr Julia the Virgin

Day 16-Jul-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Sunday of the Paralytic
Romans 12:6-14; Matthew 9:1-8
6 We have different gifts according to the grace given to us: if it is prophecy, let us
prophesy according to the measure of our faith.
7 If it is service, let us dedicate ourselves to service! He who teaches should do his
teaching; 8 or he who exhorts his exhorting.
As for the one who gives, let the giving be done with generosity.
He who rules should rule with diligence and the one who shows mercy should do
so with joy.
9 Let your love be without hypocrisy.
Reject with horror what is evil.
Cling to what is good.
10 In love for the brethren, be tenderly affectionate with one another; place the
honor of others above your own.
11 Do not fall back in zeal; be fervent in the spirit, serving the Lord.
12 Rejoice in hope, endure in troubles, persevere in prayer; 13 contribute to the
needs of the saints; look for opportunities to be hospitable.
14 Bless those who persecute you; bless, and do not curse!

Gospel Reading: Sunday of the Paralytic

Jesus entered into a boat, crossed over [the lake] and came into his own town.
2 Behold, some people brought him a man who was paralyzed, lying on a bed.
Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, 'Son, be of good cheer! Your sins are
forgiven!' 3 At this, some of the scribes said to themselves, 'This man
blasphemes!' 4 Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, 'Why do you think evil
[thoughts] in your hearts? 5 Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven' or, 'Get
up, and walk?'
6 But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive
sins' (then he said to the paralytic), 'Get up, take up your mat, and go up to your
house.
7 The man got up and departed to his house.
8 But when the crowds saw this, they were astonished and glorified God, who had
given such authority to men.

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING

Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you" (Matt. 9: 2) oday's Gospel reading underlines the Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, where he is able to forgive the sins of the paralytic man.

Nobody can forgive sins except God, yet Jesus calling Himself the Son of Man (underlining his human nature) says He has the power to forgive sins on earth (v. 6).

This reminds us of the words of the Archangel Gabriel who said to St Joseph that 'You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1: 21) showing us the purpose that Christ came into the world to save us sinners.

For us to understand the significance of giving our Lord the name Jesus, we need to understand the Hebrew version of His name, which is Yehoshua.

The name Yehoshua means 'God (Yahweh) saves' in Hebrew and this underlines the fact that God Himself came in the flesh at a particular point in history to save mankind.

The Jews believed that sickness was the result of sin and so needed healing. Therefore, Jesus heals the man, in order to show the scribes that His claim to forgive sins is true.

St Irenaeus who was Bishop of Lyons in the second century A.D. notes that, 'Therefore by remitting sins, He did indeed heal man while He also manifested Himself, who He was.

For if no one can forgive sins but God alone, while the Lord remitted them and healed men, it is plain that He was Himself the Word of God made the Son of Man" (St Irenaeus, Against Heresies 5, 17, 3). There are three signs of Christ's divinity shown: a) he knows the secrets of the hearts; b) he forgives sins, a power which belongs to God alone; and c) he heals by the power of His word.

The man wanted forgiveness more than anything else and Jesus correctly discerned this.

All physical infirmity is ultimately the consequence of sin in a general sense, and it is impossible to separate healing from forgiveness.

Forgiveness remains the priority and we need to seek forgiveness of our sins before seeking healing.

In some cases, it might be the Lord's will to give forgiveness of sins to us and then for us to give testimony to our faith in Him, while remaining physically crippled by some disease.

Our Lord not only healed the physical disorder to restore the whole man, but also heals the spiritual cause.
St Ambrose the Bishop of Milan in the fourth century A.
D., sees in this miracle an image of the resurrection, 'since by healing the wounds of soul and body, He forgives the sins of the soul, and He banishes the sickness of the body, which fact means that the whole man has been cured" (Treatise on the Gospel According to St Luke 5, 13). Another factor to the healing is Faith, which is an indispensable condition for salvation.
Faith can come from one person or many people, as in the case of the Faith of the friends of the paralytic who helped in his healing.
Christ saw their Faith (verse 2) and then gave the healing to the paralytic man.
We see here that Christ looks at the Faith of others too who might be praying for us and he does hear them! God’s salvation liberates us from captivity to the brokenness of our lives in our corrupt world, for the Son of God has truly taken on every dimension of our humanity and transfused it with holiness.
His divinity will be revealed through us as we shine with light even as the paralysed man was enabled to get up and walk toward his house.
The truth is that Christ says exactly the same thing to us all, for His forgiveness is not some kind of legal degree but a true participation in His life, holiness, and divinity which heals and transforms us into living icons of His salvation.
Seeking Jesus requires effort and emotion, energy and enthusiasm on our part.
Look at the Epistle – it emphasises diligence, fervour, strength, steadfastness as well as affection, rejoicing and cheerfulness.
Seeking Jesus is not for the half-hearted or double-minded.
Note as well what St Paul says we are to do – provide for the saints and practice hospitality.
The last point comes much harder to us – Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse! 'Happiness can only be achieved by looking inward and learning to enjoy whatever life has and this requires transforming greed into gratitude.
' (St John Chrysostom)

Day 17-Jul-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Great-martyr Marina (Margaret) of Antioch in Pisidia (270)

Marina was born in Pisidian Antioch of pagan parents. At the age of twelve, Marina learned about the Lord Jesus Christ: how He became incarnate of the All-pure Virgin and how He worked many miracles, suffered death on the Cross and gloriously resurrected. Her young heart became inflamed with love for the Lord and she vowed that she would never marry, and in her soul she further desired to suffer for Christ and be baptized in the blood of martyrdom. Her father hated her for her faith and did not consider her as his daughter. The imperial deputy, Olymbrius, learning from Marina that she was a Christian, at first desired that she would become his wife. When Marina refused, he ordered her to bow down before the idols. St. Marina replied: 'I will neither bow down nor offer sacrifice to the breathless and dead idols, who do not recognize themselves and do not know that we honor or dishonor them. I will not give them the honor that belongs only to my Creator.' Then Olymbrius subjected Marina to harsh torture, and threw her into prison, completely covered with wounds and blood. In the prison Marina prayed to God. After her prayer, the devil appeared to her in the guise of a horrible serpent that entwined itself around her head. When she made the sign of the Cross, the serpent burst apart and vanished. Then she was engulfed with a heavenly light, and it seemed to her that the walls and roof of the prison vanished, and a radiant, towering cross appeared. A white dove perched atop the cross, issuing forth a voice which said: 'Rejoice Marina, rational dove of Christ, daughter of Zion in the highest, for your day of rejoicing draws near.' Then, Marina was healed of all her wounds and pains by the power of God. The demented judge tortured her the following day, both in fire and in water, but Marina endured all, as though she were in another body. Finally, he condemned her to be beheaded. Before her death, the Lord Jesus appeared to her, accompanied by angels. She was beheaded during the reign of Diocletian; but in soul and power, she has remained alive in the heavens and on earth. A hand of St. Marina reposes in the Monastery of Vatopedi on Mount Athos. There is also a monastery dedicated to St. Marina with a portion of her miracle-working relics, located atop Mount Langa in Albania, overlooking Lake Ohrid. Countless miracles have occurred and still occur in

this monastery, witnessed not only by Christians, but by many Moslems as well. So much respect did the Turks have for this holy place, that they never dared disturb either the monastery or its property. At one time a Turk was the guardian of the monastery.

Apolytikion

O Glorious Marina, once betrothed to the Logos, you relinquished all worldly concerns and brilliantly gave struggle as a virginal beauty. You soundly trounced the invisible enemy who appeared to you, O Champion, and you are now the world's wellspring of healing grace.

Veronika and Speratos the Martyrs
Venerable Leonid of Ustnedumsk

Day 17-Jul-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 5:9-6:11; Matthew 13:54-58
9 I wrote to you in my letter to have no fellowship with those who are immoral; 10 yet I did not mean with the immoral people of this world, or with those who are greedy, dishonest, or idolaters; or else you would have to leave the world! 11 But as it is, I wrote to you not to associate with anyone who is called a brother who is a sexual sinner, or greedy, or an idolater, or a slanderer, or a drunkard, or someone dishonest.
[In fact], do not even eat with such a person! 12 Indeed, what do I have to do with judging those who are outside? Do you not judge those who are within? 13 But those who are outside, God judges.
'Put away the wicked man from among yourselves!' 6 Now, how can any of you dare go to court before the unrighteous (and not before the saints) when there is a matter against a neighbor? 2Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?f And if the world is [to be] judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? 3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more, then, things that pertain to this life? 4 And now, if you need to judge things pertaining to this life, why do you place yourselves under judges who are irrelevant in the Church? 5 I say this to move you to shame.
Is there not even one wise man among you who would be able to decide between his brothers? 6 Yet, [I hear of] lawsuits among the brethren, and that in front of unbelievers! 7 This is already a fault in you, that you have lawsuits one with another.
Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? 8 No, but you yourselves do wrong and defraud, and [you do] that against your brethren!
Immorality 9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor sodomites, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor swindlers, will inherit the Kingdom of God.
11 Some of you used to be like that, but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the Name of the Lord Jesus, and in the Spirit of our God.

Gospel Reading:
54 Coming into his own country, he taught the people in their synagogue and they were astonished, saying, 'Where did this man get this wisdom and these deeds of

power? 55 Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary, and his brothers, James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? 56 Are not all of his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all of these things?' 57 And they stumbled because of him.
But Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country and in his own house!' 58 He did not do many deeds of power there because of their unbelief.
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Day 18-Jul-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Holy Martyr Emilian (362)

He was from the town of Dorostolon in Thrace and during the reign of Julian the Apostate became a servant of the governor in that region. Before the time of his martyrdom he was a secret Christian. An imperial legate arrived in the town with orders to seize all Christians, but failed to find any; to show his pleasure he ordered a great feast for the whole town, complete with sacrifices to the pagan gods. On the night before the appointed feast, Emilian went around the town and smashed all the idols with a hammer. The following day there was an uproar, and an innocent villager was seized and charged with the crime. Emilian, seeing this, said to himself 'If I conceal my action, what sort of use has it been? Shall I not stand before God as the slayer of an innocent man?' So he presented himself to the legate and confessed what he had done. When the furious official asked Emilian on whose orders he had acted, Emilian replied 'God and my soul commanded me to destroy those dead pillars that you call gods.' As punishment, Emilian was subjected to many tortures and finally burned alive.

St Pambo, hermit of Egypt (374? 386?)

Abba Pambo was a contemporary of St Anthony the Great and one of the greatest of the Desert Fathers. He would only eat bread which he had earned by his own labors, plaiting baskets and mats out of reeds. In his later years, he became in appearance like an angel of God: his face shone so that the monks could not look on it. Through long ascetic labor, he was enabled to control his tongue so that no unnecessary word ever passed his lips. He never gave an immediate answer to even the simplest question, but always prayed and pondered on the question first. Once, when Theophilus, Patriarch of Alexandria, was visiting the monks, they begged Abba Pambo to give the Patriarch a word. He answered: 'If my silence is no help to him, neither will my words be.' He reposed in peace, some say in 374, others in 386.

Venerable Paisius and Isaiah

Venerable John the Much-suffering

Day 18-Jul-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free
Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 6:20-7:12; Matthew 14:1-13
20 You were bought with a price! Therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which belong to God.
7 About marriage and marital relations Now, concerning the matters you wrote to me about: 'it is good for a man not to touch a woman.
2 However, to avoid sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.
3 Let the husband render to his wife the affection due to her, and likewise the wife to her husband.
4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does! 5 Do not deprive each other {of marital relations} unless it is by consent and for a season, so that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer.
Then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.
6 Nevertheless, I say this by way of concession, not as a command.
7 Indeed, I wish that everyone would be like me.
However, each person has his own gift from God, one of this kind, and another of that kind.
8 Still, I say this to those who are unmarried and to widows as well: it is good for them if they remain as I am.
9 But if they do not have self-control, let them marry.
Indeed, it is better to marry than to burn.
10 But to those who are married, I command (not I, but the Lord) that the wife should not leave her husband
11 (but if she leaves, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not leave his wife.
12 As for other cases, I (not the Lord) say this: if any brother has an unbelieving wife, and if she is content to live with him, he should not leave her.

Gospel Reading:
1 At that time, Herod the tetrarch heard the report concerning Jesus, 2 and he said to his servants, 'This is John the Baptist! He is risen from the dead! That is why these powers work in him.
3 As it is, Herod had arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison for the sake

of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip.
4 For John had told him, 'It is not lawful for you to have her.
5 Even though Herod desired to have John put to death, he feared the crowds because they considered him to be a prophet.
6 But when Herod's birthday came, Herodias' daughter danced among them and pleased Herod, 7 so much that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she would ask.
8 She, prompted by her mother, said, 'Give me here, on a platter, the head of John the Baptist.
9 The king was grieved, but for the sake of his oaths and because of those who sat at the table with him, he commanded that it be brought.
10 Herod gave orders and had John beheaded in the prison.
11 His head was brought on a platter, given to the young woman, and she brought it to her mother.
12 John's disciples came, took the body, and buried it; and they went and told Jesus.
13 When Jesus heard this, he withdrew from that place in a boat and went to a deserted place apart.
When the crowds heard about this, they followed him on foot from the cities.

Day 19-Jul-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Uncovering of the relics (1903) of St Seraphim of Sarov

"The uncovering of the holy relics of St Seraphim of Sarov on July 19, 1903 was attended by many thousands, among them the foremost of the clergy and royalty; the holy Tsar Nicholas II (July 4) was one of the bearers of the relics in procession, and the Grand Duchess Elizabeth (July 5) wrote an eyewitness account of the many miracles that took place. Not only had the Saint foretold the coming of the Tsar to his glorification, and that from joy they would chant 'Christ is Risen' in summer, but he also left a letter 'for the fourth sovereign, who will come to Sarov.' This was Nicholas II, who was given the letter when he came in 1903; the contents of the letter are not known, but when he had read it, the Tsar and future Martyr, though not a man to show his emotions, was visibly shaken." (Great Horologion)

Saint Seraphim is commemorated January 2.

St Macrina, sister of St Basil the Great and St Gregory of Nyssa (380)

She was sought as a bride by many because of her exceptional beauty and wisdom as well as her noble birth. She was betrothed at a young age, and when her betrothed died, she refused to consider any more suitors, saying that since her betrothed was alive in Christ, it was not right for her to turn to another. Instead she turned to a life of virginity, ascetic struggle and prayer. She greatly influenced her younger brothers, turning them from worldly things to monastic life. She established a monastery and, with her mother Emilia, became a nun. She reposed in peace in 379.

Her brother St Gregory of Nyssa held her in special honor. He was present at her death and gave a moving oration at her funeral. He describes how, in her last moments, she prayed thus to God: 'Thou, O Lord, givest rest to our bodies in the sleep of death for a little time, then Thou wilt waken them again with the Last Trumpet. Forgive me, and grant that, when my soul is parted from my body, it may be presented before Thee stainless and without sin, and that it may be as incense before Thee.' Then she made the sign of the Cross on her brow, eyes, face and heart, and died. St Gregory's work on the resurrection of the dead (available in English as On the Soul and Resurrection) is cast in the form of a dialogue between himself and his sister Macrina in which he is the earnest but ignorant

student and she the wise and patient teacher. So do the Saints honor the Saints.

Saint Dius

Day 19-Jul-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 7:12-24; Matthew 14:35-15:11
2 As for other cases, I (not the Lord) say this: if any brother has an unbelieving
wife, and if she is content to live with him, he should not leave her.
13 [Likewise,] the woman who has an unbelieving husband who is content to live
with her should not leave her husband.
14 This is because the unbelieving husband is sanctified in his wife, and the
unbelieving wife is sanctified in her husband.
Otherwise your children would be unclean, but in fact, they are holy.
15 Yet, if the unbeliever decides to leave, let there be separation.
The brother or sister is not under constraint in such cases, but God has called us
in peace.
16 Truly, how do you know, wife, if you will save your husband? Or how do you
know, husband, if you will save your wife? Each person's state of life
17 However that may be, let each of you lead the life to which God called you as
the Lord has assigned.
This is what I command in all the Churches.
18 Was anyone called when he was circumcised? Let him not become
uncircumcised! Was anyone called when he was not circumcised? Let him not be
circumcised!
19 Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing: what matters is the
observance of the God's commandments.
20 Let everyone stay in that calling in which he was called.
21 Were you called when you were a slave? Do not let that bother you, but if you
get an opportunity to become free, use it.
22 Anyone who was called in the Lord while being a slave is a free human being
who belongs to the Lord.
Conversely, whoever was called while free is a slave of Christ.
23 You were bought with a price! Do not become slaves of [other] human beings.
24 Brethren, let everyone, in whatever condition he was called, stay in that
condition with God.

Gospel Reading:
35 When the people of that place recognized Jesus, they sent word into that entire
surrounding region and people brought him all who were sick.

36 They begged him to be able to just touch the fringe of his garment, and all those who touched it were healed.
15 About tradition(s) that nullify the word of God Pharisees and scribes then came to Jesus from Jerusalem, saying:
2 'Why do your disciples disobey the tradition of the presbyters? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.
3 Jesus answered them, 'Why do you also disobey the commandment of God because of your tradition?
4 For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother, and, 'Whoever speaks evil of father or mother should be put to death.
5 But you say, 'Anyone may tell his father or his mother,'Whatever support you might otherwise have received from me is now a gift devoted to God,' and is not bound to honor his father or mother.
6 Thus, you have made the commandment of God void because of your tradition.
7 You hypocrites! Isaias (Isaiah) prophesied about you quite well when he said:
These people draw near to me with their mouth, and honor me with their lips; but their heart is far from me! In vain do they express adoration toe me, teaching as doctrine rules made by men.
10 Jesus gathered the crowds and said to them, 'Hear, and understand.
11 What enters into the mouth does not defile a person, but what comes out of the mouth, this is what defiles a person.

Day 20-Jul-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Holy Glorious Prophet Elias (Elijah) (9th c. BC)

Read his marvellous story in the Holy Scriptures, 1 and 2 Kings. At his birth, his father Sabah saw angels of God surrounding the Prophet, clothing him in fire and feeding him flames. At the end of his years on earth, he was carried bodily to heaven by a flaming chariot; with Enoch (Gen. 5:24) he is one of the two ever to be taken bodily to heaven without first dying and being raised. He and Moses appeared standing with Christ at the Transfiguration on Mt Tabor. His name means 'The Lord is God'.

Martyrs Maria (Skobtsova), Dimitri (Klepenin) and those with them, who perished in the Nazi concentration camps (1944-1945)

Mother Maria was born in Latvia in 1891. Like many of the pre-Revolutionary Russian intelligenstia, she was an atheist and a political radical in her youth, but gradually came to accept the truths of the Faith. After the Revolution, she became part of the large Russian emigre population of Paris. There she was tonsured as a nun by Metropolitan Evlogy, and devoted herself to a life of service to the poor. With a small community of fellow-believers, she established 'houses of hospitality' for the poor, the homeless, and the alcoholic, and visited Russian emigres in mental hospitals. In 1939 Metropolitan Evlogy sent the young priest Fr Dimitry to serve Mother Maria's community; he proved to be a partner, committed even unto death, in the community's work among the poor. When the Nazis took Paris in 1940, Mother Maria, Fr Dimitry, and others of the community chose to remain in the city to care for those who had come to count on them. As Nazi persecution of Jews in France increased, the Orthodox community's work naturally expanded to include protection and care of these most helpless ones. Father Dimitri was asked to provide forged certificates of baptism to preserve the lives of Jews, and always complied. Eventually, this work led to the arrest of Mother Maria, Fr Dimitri, and their associates. A fragment survives of the Gestapo's

interrogation of Fr Dimitri:

Hoffman: If we release you, will you give your word never again to aid Jews?

Klepinin: I can say no such thing. I am a Christian and must act as I must. (Hoffman struck Klepinin across the face.)

Hoffman: Jew lover! How dare you talk of helping those swine as being a Christian duty! (Klepinin, recovering his balance, held up the cross from his cassock.)

Klepinin: Do you know this Jew? (For this, Father Dimitri was knocked to the floor.)

"Your priest did himself in," Hoffman said afterward to Sophia Pilenko. "He insists that if he were to be freed, he would act exactly as before."

Mother Maria, Fr Dimitri, and several of their colleages, were sent to the Nazi concentration camps (Mother Maria to Ravensbruck, Fr Dimitri to Buchenwald) where, after great sufferings, they perished. It is believed that Mother Maria's last act was to take the place of a Jew being sent to death, voluntarily dying in his place.

A full account of their life and death is given on the site of the Orthodox Peace Fellowship.

Mother Maria and her companions were glorified by the Patriarchate of Constantinople in 2004.

Day 20-Jul-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 7:24-35; Matthew 15:12-21

24 Brethren, let everyone, in whatever condition he was called, stay in that condition with God.

Advice to virgins and widows 25 Now, concerning virgins, I have no commandment from the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who has obtained mercy from the Lord so as to be trustworthy.

26 I think that it is good, (in view of the present distress,) for a man to remain as he is.

27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be freed.

Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife.

28 But if you do marry, you have not sinned.

If a virgin marries, she has not sinned.

Yet, those [who marry] will have tribulations in the flesh, and I want to spare you.

29 Yet, I say this, brethren: the time is short, and from now on, both those who have wives may be as though they had none; 30 and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess; 31 and those who use the world, as not using it to the fullest.

The reason is that the outward form of this world is fading away.

32 However, I desire that you should be free from [such] cares.

He who is unmarried is concerned for the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord.

33 But he who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife.

34 There is also a difference between a wife and a virgin: the virgin cares about the things of the Lord, so that she may be holy both in body and spirit.

But a married woman cares about the things of the world, how she may please her husband.

35 I say this for your own benefit; not that I may ensnare you, but [aiming] for what is appropriate, so that you may serve the Lord without distraction.

Gospel Reading:

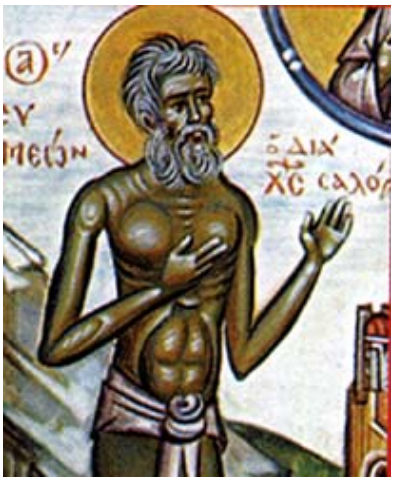
12 Then, the disciples came and said to him, 'Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?' 13 But Jesus answered, 'Every plant which my heavenly Father did not plant will be uprooted.

14 Leave them alone! They are blind guides of the blind; and if the blind guide the
blind, both will fall into a pit.
15 Peter said to him, 'Explain the parable to us.
16 And so, Jesus answered, 'Do you still fail to understand? 17 Do you not
understand that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and then
out of the body? 18 But the things which come out of the mouth come from the
heart, and they defile the person.
19 Indeed, it is from the heart that evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual sins,
thefts, false witness, and blasphemies come forth.
20 These are the things which defile a person; but to eat with unwashed hands
does not make anyone impure.
The faith of a Canaanite woman- Crumbs from their masters' table 21Jesus then
left that area and withdrew into the region of Tyre and Sidon.

Day 21-Jul-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Our Righteous Fathers John and Symeon, the Fool for Christ's Sake (570)



These two brothers in Christ were from Edessa in Mesopotamia. After a pilgrimage to Jerusalem they fled the world together; they were tonsured as monks, but soon left their monastery to struggle in prayer near the Dead Sea. Thus they passed thirty years in silence and asceticism. Symeon was then commanded by God to leave the desert and serve God among the world's people. At their parting John said to him: 'Keep your heart from all that you see in the world. Whatever there may be that touches your hand, let it not take hold of your heart. When food passes your lips, let not your heart be sweetened by it. If your feet have to move, let there be peace within you. Whatever you do outwardly, let your mind remain tranquil. Pray for me, that God may not part us from each other in the world to come.' Symeon went to Emesa in Syria, where he spent the rest of his life, feigning madness in order to conceal his holiness from men. But he performed miracles of healing and appeared to people of the city in dreams, calling them to repentance. He was given the gift of discernment of others' inward condition, and while dancing and raving through the streets would approach people, whisper their sins in their ears, and call them to repentance. He reposed peacefully in 590; John, who had remained in the desert, reposed soon afterward.

Marcella, Virgin-Martyr of Chios (ca. 1500)

Her mother died when she was very young, and she was brought up by her father. As she grew older, she grew in virtue and beauty. Her father conceived an illicit desire for her and made improper advances toward her, which troubled her so greatly that she fled her village and hid in the mountains. Her father pursued her, even wounding her with arrows in his effort to possess her. Finally she took refuge in a cloven rock. When her father found that he could not drag her from her refuge, he viciously dismembered her and threw her head into the sea. From the rock that had sheltered her a stream appeared, whose water had healing virtues. The holy Marcella is especially venerated on Chios to this day.

Prophet Ezekiel (6th c. BC)

He is commemorated today on the Slavic calendar. See July 23, his commemoration on the Greek calendar.

Day 21-Jul-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 7:35-8:7; Matthew 15:29-31
35 I say this for your own benefit; not that I may ensnare you, but [aiming] for what is appropriate, so that you may serve the Lord without distraction.
36 Nevertheless, if any man thinks that he is behaving inappropriately toward his virgin,c if she has past the flower of her age, and if it is required, let him do what he wills:d he does not sin, let them marry.
37 As for the one who stands steadfast in his heart, (having no necessity, but having control over his own heart to keep his virginity): he does well.
38 And so, he who marries his [betrothed] virgin does well, and he who does not does better.
39 A wife is bound by law for as long as her husband lives; but if the husband is dead, she is free to be married to whoever she desires, [but] only in the Lord.
40 In my judgment, she is happier if she stays as she is, and I think that I too have the Spirit of God.
8 Concerning things sacrificed to idols Now, concerning things sacrificed to idols: we know that we all have knowledge.
Knowledge makes arrogant, but love builds up.
2 But anyone who thinks that he knows anything does not yet know as he should know.
3 On the other hand, if anyone loves God, such a person is known by him.
4 Therefore, concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is only one God.
5 Indeed, although there are [many] things called 'gods,' in the heavens or on earth; and there are many [so-called] 'gods' and many 'lords.
6 Yet, to us, there is one God the Father, from whom are all things; and we [are] for him; and one Lord Jesus Christ through whom are all things, and we live through him.
7 However, such knowledge is not found in everyone.
There are some who eat things sacrificed to an idol with awareness of the idol, and their conscience (being weak) is defiled.
Gospel reading:

29 Jesus departed and came near the sea of Galilee.
He went up into the mountain and sat there.
30 Great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, blind, mute, crippled, and many others; and they put them down at his feet.

So he healed them, 31 and the crowds were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed made whole, the lame walking and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel.

Day 22-Jul-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Holy Myrrh-bearer and Equal-to-the-Apostles Mary Magdalene

She was from the town of Magdala on the Sea of Galilee, for which reason she is called "Magdalene." The Lord Jesus cast out seven demons from her, after which she became His faithful disciple, following Him even to the Cross when most of His disciples had fled. With the other holy Myrrh-bearers, she prepared the spices to anoint His body and carried them to His tomb. There she was one of the first witnesses to the Resurrection, and the first to proclaim it.

Various traditions hold that, after Christ's ascension, she traveled to Rome, where she presented the Emperor with a red egg and proclaimed "Christ is Risen!" For this reason her icons often show her holding a red egg, and from this the tradition of distributing red eggs at Pascha is said to have arisen. She is then said to have travelled to Ephesus where she helped St John the Theologian in his gospel ministry before reposing there.

Mary Magdalene is sometimes identified with the "sinful woman" of the Gospels, but this is not the Church's tradition. Neither the Gospels nor the sacred hymnography of the Church make this connection.

The name 'Madeleine' is a form of 'Magdalene'.

Holy Martyr Markella

Day 22-Jul-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Romans 12:1-3; Matthew 10:37-11:1

12 Therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your rational offering of divine service.
2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what is the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God.
3 By the grace that was given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you should! Instead, think [of yourselves] reasonably, as God has apportioned to everyone a measure of faith.

Gospel Reading:

37 Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.
38 Whoever does not take his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me.
39 The one who saves his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will obtain it.
40 Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.
41 Whoever receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward.
Whoever receives a righteous person because of this person's righteousness will receive the reward of the righteous.
42 Amen, I tell you that whoever gives one of these little ones even just a cup of cold water to drink because he is a disciple will in no way lose his reward.
11 When Jesus had finished giving instructions to his twelve disciples, he left that place to teach and preach in their cities.

Day 23-Jul-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Hieromartyr Apollinarius, bishop of Ravenna (75)

He was a disciple of St Peter, born in Antioch. St Peter took him to Rome (he was bishop of Antioch before being bishop of Rome, so Antioch is as much the 'see of Peter' as is Rome) and made him Bishop of Ravenna. In Ravenna, he healed the wife of the military governor of a grave illness, after which the governor and his household confessed Christ and were baptized. Apollinarius was able to form a house church in the governor's home, from which he labored for the Gospel for twelve years. Eventually, he was condemned to exile in Illyria for his faith, and began a life of missionary travel in the Balkans, travelling as far as the Danube. After twelve years of this work, he was driven back to Italy by the hostility of some of the pagans. He was received with joy by the people of Ravenna, which aroused the envy of the pagan elders, who denounced him to the Emperor Vespasian. When the elders asked permission to kill Apollinarius, the Emperor only gave them permission to drive him from the city, wisely saying 'It is not seemly to take revenge on behalf of the gods, for they can themselves be revenged on their enemies if they are angered.' But, in defiance of the Imperial decree, the pagan leaders attacked and killed Apollinarius with knives. His holy relics are preserved in Ravenna, in a church dedicated to him.

Holy Prophet Ezekiel (6th c. BC)

He is counted as the third-ranked of the Major Prophets. Read the Old Testament book that bears his name, in which the Church recognizes prophecies of the Lord's Incarnation by the Virgin and of the general resurrection of mankind.

Righteous Anna (Hannah), mother of the prophet Samuel Righteous Anna (Hannah), mother of the prophet Samuel

Holy Martyrs Trophimos and Theophilios, and thirteen others with them in Lycia

Day 23-Jul-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Sunday of the two blind men and the demoniac
Romans 15:1-7; Matthew 9:27-35
15 Endurance and encouragement Now, we who are strong should bear the
weaknesses of the weak, and not {just} please ourselves.
2Let each one of us please our neighbor for what is good, to be edifying to him.
3Even Christ did not please himself.
But, as it is written, 'The insults of those who insulted you fell on me.
c 4For whatever things were written before were written for our instruction, so that
through patience and through the Scriptures' encouragementd we might have
hope.
5Now, may the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to be together of
the same mind according to Christ Jesus, 6 so that with one accord, you may with
one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
7 Therefore, accept one another, even as Christ also accepted you, to the glory of
God.

Gospel Reading: Sunday of the two blind men and the demoniac

27 As Jesus passed by
from there, two blind
men followed him,
calling out and saying,
'Have mercy on us, son
of David!' 28 When he
entered the house, the
blind men came to him.
Jesus asked them, 'Do
you believe that I am
able to do this?' They
replied, 'Yes, Lord.
29 He then touched their
eyes, saying, 'According
to your faith, let it be
done to you!' 30 And
their eyes were opened.
Jesus strictly commanded them, saying, 'See that no one knows about this.

31 However, they went out and spread his fame throughout that entire land.
32 As they were leaving, behold, a mute man who was demon-possessed was brought to him.
33 When the demon was cast out, the mute began to speak.
The multitudes marveled, saying, 'Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel!'
34 But the Pharisees said, 'It is by the prince of the demons that he casts out demons.
35 Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the Good News of the Kingdom.
He also healed every kind of disease and sickness among the people.

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING
In today's Gospel reading, St Matthew reminds us that through faith in Christ our lives can be transformed, and we can be made whole, while also warning us that hardheartedness leads us away from Christ, no matter how religious we might externally appear.
The Evangelist immediately places before us two blind men.
Blindness, along with other physical ailments, was a cause to be considered an outcast at the time of Christ, and also illness had a close link with sin.
The two men initially express a confused belief in Christ shouting, 'Have mercy on us, Son of David".
Here they recognise Christ as the Messiah, as Son of David, and perhaps as St Theophylact of Ochrid points out, through asking for mercy, have begun to understand Christ's divine nature to some extent.
Christ does not react instantaneously, instead, he asks them, 'Do you believe that I am able to do this?'.
In doing so, he is asking them to confess their faith, and is respecting their freedom as humans, made in the image of God.
The blind men's response is a simple and heartfelt 'Yes, Lord", to which Christ replies 'According to your faith let it be done to you".
The two men make a direct confession of their belief.
Christ, however, while healing them also calls them to cooperation with God in accepting the miracle, as the miracle is done, 'according to your faith".
Having regained their sight, Christ asks them out of humility and to avoid people discovering who he truly is to, 'See that no one knows of this".
The two blind men promptly spread the news of their healing, not out of disobedience to Christ's instruction, but rather out of thanksgiving and joy for their being made whole again.
Following this, another healing takes place, 'a demoniac who was mute was brought to him… the one who had been mute spoke".
In this case the man is so overcome by evil and his health, and unable both physically and spiritual to express his belief, that Christ simply heals the man without initially requiring his faith and cooperation.

The people of the area were amazed, and set Christ, through his authority to heal by a word alone, above the Prophets and Patriarchs of Israel, 'never has anything like this been seen in Israel".
The Pharisees, placed in opposition to Christ, are unable to accept, unlike the blind men, that what Christ is doing is from God, and instead suggest that, 'by the ruler of the demons he casts out the demons".
As we know (from Matthew 12:25) this is simply not possible, 'every city or house divided against itself will not stand".
Christ's work can only come from God as he is preaching the Kingdom, healing illness, and forgiving sins.
The work of the demons is diametrically opposed to such a ministry.
St Matthew calls us to place ourselves in the shoes of the blind men.
While we have faith in Christ and follow him, there will be times when we find ourselves spiritually blind, and cut off from God through our sins.
In some ways, this is an even deeper blindness than the physical one the men experienced.
Christ asks us to turn back to him, through repentance and confession, and is waiting expectantly for us to make that return.
It is not enough for us for Christ to ask us to make that return, we actually have to cooperate with him, through our confession of faith, through returning to the Church, through engaging with the ascetic life, and through seeking reconciliation through confession.
We are made in the image of God and have free will, as such Christ is not a spiritual 'fanatic" who will force us to do things; we have to proclaim that 'yes", and accept our being made whole, and having received it, aim to maintain this synergy with God as much as possible, in case we sink back into spiritual darkness.
If we allow Christ to transform us in this way, we can begin to enter into theosis and accept Christ's transformational healing more and more in our lives, and draw ever closer to him.
However, in saying this, as in the case of the demoniac, we are not limiting Christ, if we become too separated from God, then he entirely capable of making that first move, and re-orientating us towards him, and initiating that discussion of return and cooperation.
Like the blind men and the crowds let us be thankful for Christ's healing in our lives and that of others, and flee the hard-heartedness, ingratitude and thanklessness the Pharisees displayed! May the light of Christ illumine all of our blindness!

Day 24-Jul-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Martyr Christina of Tyre (200)

She was from Tyre in Syria, the daughter of a pagan named Urban. She is a miraculous example of one brought to faith in Christ without any human intervention. When she was about eleven years old, her father, seeing her great beauty and wanting to protect her from men until she was grown, made her live alone on the top floor of a fine house, with slaves, all worldly comforts, and gold and silver idols. Passing the time by looking out the window, Christina came by her meditations on the beauty and order of nature to believe in the one, living God. An Angel of the Lord then came to her, who marked her with the sign of the Cross and instructed her in the truth of the Gospel. The newly-enlightened Christina smashed all the idols in her room, so infuriating her father that he sent her to be tortured and beheaded for her faith. Her father, though in good health and in the prime of life, died that night. Christina was subjected to horrible tortures and mutilations, and finally died by the sword, her faith unshaken.

Troparion to St Christina: O Lord Jesus, unto Thee Thy lamb doth cry with a great voice:* O my Bridegroom, Thee I love;* and seeking Thee, I now contest, and with Thy baptism am crucified and buried.* I suffer for Thy sake, that I may reign with Thee;* for Thy sake I die, that I may live in Thee:* accept me offered out of longing to Thee as a spotless sacrifice.* Lord, save our souls through her intercessions,* since Thou art great in mercy.

Holy Martyrs and Passion-bearers Boris and Gleb of Russia, in holy baptism Romanus and David (1015)

Pious sons of Prince Vladimir, enlightener of Russia, they were named Romanus and David in Baptism. When Prince Vladimir died, his kingdom was divided among his sons (prior to baptism, he had children by several wives). But Prince Svyatopolk, not content with his share, resolved to have his brothers murdered in order to take their territories. Both brothers knew of the plan, but resolved not to take up arms against their brother, to avoid civil war and to fulfil the commandment "Resist not evil." Their bodies remained incorrupt and fragrant in death. They are buried in Vyshgorod.

Note: Since every Orthodox Christian should be baptized with the name of a known Orthodox Saint, how do we get new Saints' names over the years? We see the process at work with St Vladimir and his sons Boris and Gleb. At baptism they received new Christian names, but when they were glorified,

their (originally) pagan names were sanctified. Since then, countless Russians and others have been named Vladimir, Boris or Gleb at baptism.

Day 24-Jul-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 9:13-18; Matthew 16:1-6
13 Do you not know that the ministers in the temple get their food from the temple,
and that those who serve at the altar have their share from the altar? 14 Even so,
the Lord ordained that those who proclaim the Good News should live from the
Good News.
15 However, I have used none of these things, and I do not write these things so
that it may be done so in my case.
As it is, I would rather die than to see anyone make my boasting void! 16 Indeed, if
I preach the Good News, I have nothing to boast about! This necessity is placed
on me: woe unto me, if I do not preach the Good News! 17 For if I do this of my
own will, I have a reward, but if it is not of my own will, then I have a stewardship
entrusted to me.
18 What then is my reward? That, when I preach the Gospel, I may present the
Good News of Christ for free, in order not to abuse my authority in the Good News.

Gospel Reading:
16 Seeking after a sign- The yeast or leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees The
Pharisees and Sadducees came and put Jesus to the test by asking him to show
them a signb from heaven.
2But he answered them,c 'When it is evening, you say, 'The weather will be
pleasant because the sky is red.
3In the morning, you say, 'The weather will be bad today because the sky is red
and threatening.
Hypocrites! You know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but you cannot
discern the signs of the times! 4An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a
sign, but no sign will be given to this generation, except the sign of the prophet
Jonah.
He left them and moved on.
5The disciples, arriving to the other side, [noticed that they] had forgotten to take
bread.
6 Jesus then said to them, 'Take heed and beware of the yeast of the Pharisees
and Sadducees!'

Day 25-Jul-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Dormition of the Righteous Anna, mother of the Most Holy Theotokos

According to tradition, both Anna and her husband Joachim had reposed by the time the Most Holy Theotokos was about eleven years old and living in the Temple; thus when she reached maturity she was an orphan, and was given into the care of the noble Joseph. The prayers of St Anna are invoked for conceiving children and for help in difficult childbirth. Her main feast is on September 9th.
Commemoration of the holy 165 Fathers of the Fifth Ecumenical Council (553)
This council was held in Constantinople during the reign of Justinian the Great. The council condemned the various forms of monophysitism, the heretical writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia and Theodoret, and the writings of Origen (particularly on universal salvation).

St Olympias the Deaconess (408)

She was born to a noble family in Constantinople: her father Anysius Secundus was a senator. She was betrothed to a nobleman who died before they could be wed; resisting all advice to take another husband, Olympias devoted herself entirely to God, giving her large inheritance to the Church and to the poor. She served as a deaconess, first under the Patriarch Nektarios, then under St John Chrysostom. When St John was sent into exile, he advised her to remain in Constantinople, and to continue to serve the Church whatever patriarch took his place. But as soon as the holy hierarch went into exile, a fire destroyed a large part of the City, and St John's enemies accused the holy Olympias of setting the fire. She in turn was exiled to Nikomedia, where she reposed in 408. She left instructions that her body be placed in a coffin and thrown into the sea, to be buried wherever it was cast up. The coffin came to shore at Vrochthoi and was buried there at a church dedicated to the Apostle Thomas. Her relics have continued to be a source of great miracles of healing.

During his exile, St John Chrysostom wrote a number of letters to St Olympias, seventeen of which have been preserved through the centuries. In one he writes: 'Now I am deeply joyful, not only because you have been

delivered from sickness, but even more because you are bearing adversities with such fortitude, calling them trifles — a characteristic of a soul filled with power and abounding in the rich fruits of courage. You are not only enduring misfortune with fortitude, but are making light of it in a seemingly effortless way, rejoicing and triumphing over it — this is a proof of the greatest wisdom.'

Day 25-Jul-2023 Tuesday

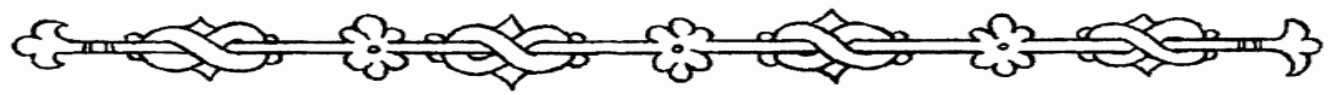
Fast Free

Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 10:5-12; Matthew 16:6-12

5 However, God was not well pleased with most of them because they were struck down in the wilderness.
6 Now these things were written as examples for us, so that we may not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.
7 Do not become idolaters, as some of them were.
As it is written, 'The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.
8 Let us not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell! 9 Let us not put the Lord to the test, as some of them did, and they perished by the poisonous snakes.
10 Let us not grumble either, as some of them did, and they were killed by the destroying angel.
11 Now, all these things happened to them as an example and they were written for our instruction, since the ends of the ages have come on us.
12 Therefore, let the one who thinks that he is standing be careful not to fall.

Gospel Reading:

6 Jesus then said to them, 'Take heed and beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees!'
7 At this, they reasoned among themselves, saying, 'We brought no bread!'
8 Perceiving this, Jesus said, 'Why do you reason among yourselves, you of little faith, 'because you have brought no bread?'
9 Do you still not understand or remember the five loaves that fed the five thousand and how many baskets you gathered up? 10 Or do you not remember the seven loaves for the four thousand and how many baskets you took up? 11 How is it that you do not understand that I was not speaking to you about {physical} bread? But beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees!'
12 Then, they understood that he had not told them to beware of the yeast of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.



Day 26-Jul-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Hieromartyrs Hermolaus (305), Hermippus, and Hermocrates at Nicomedia

They were priests in Nicomedia; it was Hermolaus who converted St Panteleimon (July 27) to Christ. When St Panteleimon, interrogated by Maximian, was asked who had turned him from the idols, he named Hermolaus. (The Great Horologion notes that it had been revealed to Panteleimon that the time of Hermolaus' martyrdom was near at hand). St Hermolaus was arrested allong with Sts Hermippus and Hermocrates and, when they proclaimed Christ to be the only true God, all were beheaded. St Hermolaus, along with his disciple St Panteleimon, is counted as one of the Unmercenary Physicians.

Holy Righteous Martyr Paraskeve (140)

She was born near Rome to pious parents. Since she was born on a Friday, she was named Paraskeve (Friday in Greek; literally "preparation" or "preparedness" because Friday was the Biblical Day of Preparation for the Sabbath). From early childhood she studied the scriptures, consecrated herself to a monastic life, and brought many to faith in Christ by her example and teaching. During the reign of Antoninus she was arrested because she was a Christian. When ordered to worship the idols, she answered "Let the gods that have not made heaven and the earth perish from off the earth" (Jeremiah 10:11). For this, after severe tortures she was beheaded in 140.

Saint James (Jakov) Netsvetov, Missionary to Alaska (1864)

He was born on the island of Atka in 1802, to a Russian father and an Aleut mother. Traveling to Russia, he attended the seminary in Irkutsk, and returned to Alaska after being ordained to the priesthood. For the next thirty-six years

he served as missionary and pastor to the Alaskan people, undergoing tremendous hardships to do so. He first traveled among the peoples of the Aleutian islands, using native kayaks to paddle between the islands. From 1845 to 1863 he worked among the native people of the Yukon valley, traveling from village to village by dog-sled. He was the first Orthodox priest to serve the area since the hieromartyr Juvenaly, companion of St Herman. He carried with him a tent which served as a traveling church, in which he served the Divine Liturgy wherever he went — though sometimes the services could not be held because the bread and wine had frozen. Toward the end of his life, worn out by his labors, he settled for a brief time in Sitka, where he reposed in peace in 1864.

Venerable Moses the Hungarian

Day 26-Jul-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 10:12-22; Matthew 16:20-24

12 Therefore, let the one who thinks that he is standing be careful not to fall.
13 No temptation has come to you that is not common to everyone.
God is faithful: he will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able to resist, but with the temptation he will also create a way to escape, so that you may be able to endure it.
14 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.
15 I speak [to you] as to people that have common sense.
Judge what I say: 16 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is not it a sharing in the body of Christ?
17 Because there is one loaf of bread, we, who are many, are one body because we all partake of the one loaf of bread.
18 Consider Israel according to the flesh: is it not true that those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar?
19 What am I saying then: that something sacrificed to idols is meaningful,a or that an idol is anything?
20 [No], but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons.
21 You cannot drink from the cup of the Lord and also from the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and of the table of demons as well.
22 Or do we [want to] provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

Gospel Reading:

20 Then, he commanded the disciples not to tell anyone that he was Jesus, the Christ.
21 From that time, Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he had to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the presbyters, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up.
22 Peter then took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'Far be it from you, Lord! This will never be done to you!'
23 But Jesus turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God but on the things of men.

24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.

Day 27-Jul-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Holy Great-martyr and Healer Panteleimon (305)

He was born in Nicomedia; his father was a pagan, his mother a Christian. Through her he was taught the Christian Faith and baptized by St Hermolaus (July 26). He became a physician, and practiced his art with compassion and generosity, healing many more through his prayers as by his medicines. His parents had named him Pantoleon ("in all things a lion"), but because of his great compassion he was re-named Panteleimon ("all-merciful"). He once healed a man of blindness by calling on Christ, which led the once-blind man to embrace the Faith. When asked how he came to be healed he named Panteleimon as his healer and proclaimed his newfound faith in Christ. For this the pagans executed him, then arrested Panteleimon, who after many tortures was beheaded in 305. He is counted as the foremost of the Unmercenary Physicians.

St Clement, Archbishop of Ochrid (916)

He was a disciple of Saints Methodius and Cyril, working with them in their missionary labors in Moravia. After the death of St Methodius, Clement and many others of their mission were driven out of Moravia by the Germans, and traveled south. Clement, with his companions Gorazd, Nahum, Sava and Angelarius, crossed the Danube, stayed for a time with King Boris Michael, and settled in near Ochrid (in what is now Kosova, Yugoslavia). He founded a monastery at Belica, then moved to Ochrid, where he built a church dedicated to St Panteleimon. There he continued the work of Sts Cyril and Methodius, producing many books in the new Slavonic script for the help of the Slavic Orthodox people. Saint Clement performed miracles in his own lifetime and after his repose: his wonder-working relics are still venerated in a church dedicated to him. He reposed in peace.

Commemoration of the canonization (1970) of St Herman of Alaska (1837)

His feast day is December 12. Due to the severity of the Alaskan climate, the annual pilgrimage to his relics in Kodiak, Alaska, is in the Summer, around this date.

Blessed Nicholas, the Fool-for-Christ
Martyrs of Thrace who were drowned

Day 27-Jul-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 10:28-11:7; Matthew 16:24-28

28 But if anyone says to you, 'This was offered to idols,' do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for the sake of conscience, for 'the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness.
29 I say conscience, not your own, but the other's conscience.
But why is my freedom judged by someone else's conscience? 30 If I partake with gratefulness, why am I denounced for what I give thanks for? 31 And so, whether you eat, or drink, or whatever [else] you do, do it all to the glory of God.
32 Give no occasions for stumbling, either to Jews, or to Greeks, or to the Church of God;
33 even as I also [attempt to] please everyone in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, so that they may be saved.
Be my imitators, even as I imitate Christ.
Headship – Discipline in the assembly 2 Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things, and hold firm to the traditions as I delivered them to you.
3But I desire you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God.
4 Every man praying or prophesying with his head covered dishonors his head.
5 But every woman praying or prophesying with her head unveiled dishonors her head, and it is as if she were shaved.
6 Indeed, if a woman does not wear a head covering,a she should be shaved; and if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, then let her be covered.
7 Certainly, a man should not have his head covered, because he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man.

Gospel Reading:

24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.
25 Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever will lose his life for my sake will find it.
26 Indeed, what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and loses his life? Or what will a person give in exchange for his life?
27 For the Son of Man will come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then, he will render to everyone according to their deeds.

28 Amen, I tell you: some are standing here who will not have tasted death until
they see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom.
h

Day 28-Jul-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Apostles of the Seventy and Deacons Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon and Parmenas

They are mentioned by name in Acts 6:5. St Prochorus became Bishop of Nicomedia and reposed in peace. St Nicanor was stoned to death in Jerusalem. St Timon became Bishop of Bostra in Arabia and ended his life in martyrdom by fire at the hands of the pagans. St Parmenas died in peace in Jerusalem.

St Irene, Abbess of the Convent of Chrysovalantou (912)

"Saint Irene, who was from Cappadocia, flourished in the ninth century. Because of her great beauty and virtue, she was brought to Constantinople as a prospective bride for the young Emperor Michael (8422-867); however, as St Joannicius the Great foretold, it was God's will that she assume the monastic habit instead. She shone forth in great ascetical labors, and suffered many attacks from the demons; while yet a novice, she attained to the practice of St Arsenius the Great, of praying the whole night long with arms stretched out towards Heaven (see May 8). God showed forth great signs and wonders in her, and she became the Abbess of the Convent of

Chrysovalantou. She was granted the gift of clairvoyance and knew the thoughts of all that came to her. She appeared in a vision to the king and rebuked him for unjustly imprisoning a nobleman who had been falsely accused. Through a sailor from Patmos to whom he had appeared, St John the Theologian sent her fragrant and wondrous apples from Paradise. She reposed at the age of 103, still retaining the youthful beauty of her countenance. After her repose, marvellous healings beyond number have been wrought by her to the present day." (Great Horologion)

Venerable Paul of the Monastery of Xeropotamou

Day 28-Jul-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 11:8-22; Matthew 17:10-18
8 Man is not from woman, but woman from man; 9 for man was not created for the woman, but woman for the man.
10 For this cause, a woman should have [a sign of] authority on her head, because of the angels.
11 Nevertheless, in the Lord, a woman is not independent from the man or a man independent from the woman.
12 For as woman came from man, so a man also comes [to life] through a woman; but all things are from God.
13 Judge for yourselves: is it appropriate that a woman pray to God unveiled? 14 Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, 15 but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her, because her hair is given to her as a covering.
16 But if anyone wishes to dispute these things, we have no other custom, and neither do God's Churches.
17 Yet, in giving you this instruction, I do not praise you, as you come together not for the better but for the worse.
18 First of all, when you come together as Church, I hear that divisions take place among you, and I partly believe it.
19 Indeed, there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may be revealed among you.
20 As it is, when you gather together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat,
21because each one takes his own supper first!d One is hungry, and another is drunk! 22 Do you not have houses where you can eat and drink? Or do you despise God's Church and put to shame those who have nothing? What shall I tell you? Shall I praise you? In this, I do not praise you.
Gospel reading:

10 His disciples asked him, 'Why then is it that the scribes say that Elias (Elijah) must come first?' 11 Jesus answered them, 'Elias (Elijah) indeed is coming first, and he will restore all things.
12 But I tell you that Elias (Elijah) has already come, and they did not recognize him.
Instead, they did to him whatever they wanted to.
Likewise, the Son of Man will also suffer at their hands.
13 Then, the disciples understood that he was speaking about John the Baptist.

The healing of a possessed boy 14 When they came to the crowd, a man came to Jesus.
He knelt down before him and said: 15 'Lord, have mercy on my son! He is epileptic and suffers terribly as he often falls into the fire and in the water.
16 And so, I brought him to your disciples, but they could not cure him.
17 Jesus answered, 'Faithless and perverse generation! How much longer must I be with you? How long must I bear with you? Bring him to me.
18 When Jesus rebuked it, the demon went out of the boy and he was cured from that hour.

Day 29-Jul-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Holy Martyr Callinicus of Gangra in Asia Minor (c. 250)

He was born in Cilicia to a pious family. He left all worldly things and devoted his life to preaching the Gospel of Christ, for which he was arrested in Ancyra by the governor Sacerdos. When he was commanded to worship the idols or suffer torture, Callinicus replied, 'Every torture for my God is as welcome to me as bread to a hungry man.' After harsh torture, the governor had him shod in shoes in which nails had been set pointing upright, and had him driven on foot to the town of Gangra. (The governor was afraid to keep him in Ancyra, since many of the people were turning to Christ through the Saint's example.) On the way, when the soldiers became thirsty, Callinicus prayed to God and brought forth water from a rock. At Gangra he was thrown alive into a furnace. When the fire was out, his dead body was found completely unharmed.

Holy Martyr Seraphima (2nd c.)

She was a maiden from Antioch who lived (perhaps as a slave) in the house of Sabina, wife of a Senator. When Seraphima brought the senator's wife to faith in Christ, the governor summoned Seraphima before him. When she held firm in her faith, he cast her into prison and send several young men to her cell by night to defile her. When they arrived, she was praying to God, and an angel of the Lord appeared before them, clothed in light and bearing a sword; and the young men fell down unconscious. Finally, Seraphima received her martyr's crown when she was beheaded by the governor's order. Sabina, the senator's wife, recovered and buried her body, from which a healing myrrh flowed. This was during the reign of Hadrian.

Holy Virgin Martyr Theodota

Day 29-Jul-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Romans 13:1-10; Matthew 12:30-37

13 Let every human being be in subjection to the higher authorities because there
is no authority except from God, and those who exist are ordained by God.
2 Therefore, whoever opposes the authority opposes the ordinance of God and
rebels will receive judgment upon themselves.
3 Certainly, rulers are not a terror to the good deed, but to the evil [deed]! Do you
desire to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will have
praise [from the authority], 4 because it is for you a minister of God for good.
But if you do what is evil, then be afraid, because it does not bear the sword in
vain; it is a servant of God, an avenger of wrath to anyone who does evil.
5 Therefore, you need to be in subjection, not only because of the wrath, but also
for the sake of conscience.
6 For this reason, you also pay taxes, because the authorities are ministers of
God's service, always taking care of this purpose.
7 And so, give to everyone as you owe: taxes to whom taxes are due; revenues to
whom revenues are due; respect to whom respect is due; honor to whom honor is
due! Love, the fulfillment of the law- The day is near 8 Do not owe anything to
anyone, except to love one another; for whoever loves the othere has fulfilled the
law.
9 Indeed, these commandments ('You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not
murder,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 'You shall not
covet,' and whatever other commandments there are,) are all summed up in this
very saying, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.
10 Love does not harm a neighbor.
Love therefore is the fulfillment of the law.

Gospel Reading:

30 Whoever is not with me is against me! Whoever does not gather with me
scatters! 31 Therefore, I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven, but the
blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.
32 Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone
who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, neither in this age, nor in
the one which is to come.
33 Make the tree good and its fruit [will be] good, or make the tree corrupt and its

fruit [will be] corrupt, for the tree is known by its fruit.
34 You offspring of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak good things? Indeed,
words flow out of what fills the heart.
35 The good man brings out good things out of his good treasure, and the evil man
brings out evil things out of his evil treasure.
36 I tell you that for every idle word that people speak, they will give an account of
it in the day of judgment.
37 For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be
condemned.

Day 30-Jul-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Apostles Silas, Silvanus, Crescens, Epenetus, and Andronicus of the Seventy

St Silas was a companion and fellow-worker of the Apostle Paul (see Acts 15). He became Bishop of Corinth and reposed in peace. St Silvanus became Bishop of Thessalonica and reposed in peace. St Crescens, mentioned by St Paul in 2 Timothy 4:10, became Bishop of Chalcedon. St Epenetus, praised by St Paul in Romans 16:5 as "my well-beloved Epenetus, the first-fruits of Achaia" (that is the first Christian from the Greek land) became Bishop of Carthage. St Andronicus and his fellow-worker Junia are also commemorated May 17.

Hieromarytyr Polychronius, Bishop of Babylon, and those with him (251)

"when the Emperor decius conquered Babylon, he arrested Polychronius, together with three priests, two deacons and two baptised princes, Eudin and Senis. Polychronius would make no reply before the Emperor, but kept silent, while St Parmenius, one of the priests, spoke for them all. The Emperor took the bishop and priests to Persia, to the city of Kordoba, and had them beheaded with an axe, but he took the princes with him to Rome, threw them first to the wild beasts and then had them slain with the sword. They all suffered with honour in 251." (Prologue)

Venerable Angelina, Princess of Albania.

She was the daughter of Scanderbeg, Albania's national hero. She married Stefan, Prince of Serbia, a kinsman of Scanderbeg who sought refuge in his court. Stefan, a gentle, God-fearing man, had been blinded by the Turkish Sultan. Princess Angelina, loving him despite his loss of his vision and his worldly kingdom, married him with her father's blessing. Together they had two sons, George and John. When their sons were grown, Albania was ravaged by an invasion of the Turks. Stefan, with Angelina and their sons, fled to Italy, where they lived until his repose in 1468. The widowed Angelina buried her husband in his Serbian homeland and devoted her remaining years to good works. Her elder son George gave up his princely title and entered monastic life. John married but died without children in 1503. When Angelina had outlived her two sons as well as her husband she too entered monastic life. She was buried with her sons at Krušedol monastery in northern Serbia.

There her miracle-working relics are venerated to this day, and a service is held each year in her memory. She, her husband and her two sons are all glorified as saints of the Church.

Day 30-Jul-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand
1 Corinthians 1:10-18; Matthew 14:14-22
10 Now I beg you, brethren, through the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you.
Instead, may you be perfected together in the same mind and opinion.
b 11 As it is, those who are from Chloe's household have informed me concerning you my brethren, that there are quarrels among you.
12 Now I mean this: that each one of you says, 'I follow Paul,' 'I follow Apollos,' 'I follow Kephas,' or, 'I follow Christ.
13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 14 I thank God that I baptized none of you, except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so that no one should say that I baptized you into my own name.
16 (I also baptized the household of Stephanas; besides them, I do not know whether I baptized any other.
) The cross of Christ – No boasting 17 Indeed, Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the Good News- not in wisdom of words, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.
18 For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are dying, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Gospel Reading: Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

14 Jesus went out and saw that there was a great crowd.
He had compassion on them and healed their sick.
15 When evening came, his disciples came to him and said, 'This place is deserted, and the hour is already late.
Send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.
16 But Jesus said to them, 'They do not need to go away.

You give them something to eat.
17 They replied, 'We only have here five loaves and two fish!' 18 Jesus said, 'Bring them to me.
19 Having instructed the crowds to sit down on the grass, he took the five loaves and the two fish.
Looking up to heaven,a he blessed, broke and gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples distributed it to the multitudes.
20 And so, everyone ate and was satisfied.
His disciples gathered up twelve baskets full of what remained left over from the broken pieces.
21 Those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.
The Lord and Peter walk on water 22 Immediately after this, Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and told them to go ahead of him to the other side, while he would send the crowds away.

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING
Today's Gospel reading tells us one of the most familiar stories in the whole of the Scriptures. Each of the Gospel writers has his own way of telling the story, and of bringing out something of its significance.
The longest version of the miracle is found in St John's Gospel, where it becomes the starting point for a sermon on the significance of Holy Communion.
St Matthew's Gospel (today's reading) gives the shortest account of the story and concentrates our attention on the physical details.
The crowd have been following Jesus all day, listening to his words, and now it is evening and they are far from any settlement.
The disciples express concern: these people are tired and hungry, and need to be fed.
But they are all in the wilderness, where no food is to be had.
Jesus, however, instead of agreeing with them and doing the sensible thing by sending the crowd away tells his disciples to feed the multitude.
It is clearly an impossible task – the most that can be mustered from their supplies is barely enough for one.
Yet Jesus takes this pitiful offering and giving thanks to God gives it back to them to distribute.
And suddenly there is an inexhaustible supply of food – enough to feed more than five thousand people, and so much left over that each of the disciples can carry a basketful with remains.
St Matthew leaves the story there.
He does not spell out for us all that it implies.
Instead, he expects us to hear or read his work with a heart open to its resonances.
The crowd that follows Jesus into the wilderness should recall the Children of

Israel following Moses in the desert, for Jesus is the promised 'Prophet like Moses" of Deuteronomy 18: 15- 18.
The bread that they eat then becomes reminiscent of the 'manna", the supernatural bread which fed the Israelites on their journey to the Promised Land, the bread from Heaven.
In short, this story brings the Exodus alive once more.
But it is not a simple repetition.
The bread, supernaturally multiplied as it is, has come not from Heaven but from the earth.
It has been offered to the Lord by his disciples, and it is their offering, blessed by God and joined with the power of Christ, that feeds the multitudes.
Here is something different.
In the Exodus God displays his power; here he displays his power in and through the gifts offered to him by human beings.
Without the grace of God, it is true, the people would not have been fed.
But it is also true that they would not have been fed had it not been for the work of human hands freely offered.
And so we are once more confronted by the challenge of the Gospel.
In the Marriage Service we pray for the couple to be blessed with an increase of all good things: 'Fill their houses with wheat, wine and oil and every good thing, so that they may also share them with those in need.
' The good things of the world are given to us by God not simply that we may return them to him in a closed loop, but so that we may offer them for his blessing that they may spread from us to others.
Just as the disciples found that their offering of bread and fish - with the power of Christ- was more than sufficient for a multitude, so also may we find that what we offer to the Lord may be used by him for the increase of his kingdom.
"Is Christ divided" What he saith comes to this: "Ye have cut in pieces Christ, and distributed His body." Here is anger! here is chiding! here are words full of indignation! For whenever instead of arguing he interrogates only, his doing so implies a confessed absurdity.
But some say that he glanced at something else, in saying, "Christ is divided:" as if he had said, "He hath distributed to men and parted the Church, and taken one share Himself, giving them the other." Then in what follows, he labors to overthrow this absurdity, saying, "Was Paul crucified for you, or were ye baptized into the name of Paul?" Observe his Christ-loving mind; how thenceforth he brings the whole matter to a point in his own name, shewing, and more than shewing, that this honour belongs to no one.
And that no one might think it was envy which moved him to say these things, therefore he is constantly putting himself forward.
Observe, too, his considerate way, in that he saith not, "Did Paul make the world? did Paul from nothing produce you into being?" But only those things which belonged as choice treasures to the faithful, and were regarded with great

solicitude-those he specifies, the Cross, and Baptism, and the blessings following on these.

For the loving-kindness of God towards men is shewn by the creation of the world also: in nothing, however, so much as by the condescension through the Cross. And he said not, "did Paul die for you?" but, "was Paul crucified?" setting down also the kind of death.

St John Chrysostom, Homily III on Corinthians

Day 31-Jul-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Forefeast of the Procession of the Precious and Life-giving Cross of the Lord.
† Righteous Eudocimus of Cappadocia (9th c.)

> "Saint Eudocimus was from Cappadocia, the son of pious and most illustrious parents, patricians in rank. He especially cultivated chastity and mercy, the one by never meeting the gaze of a woman, the other by cheerfully providing the needs of the poor. When he was made military commander of Cappadocia, he continued in his righteous ways, showing mercy and uprightness in all his dealings. Having so lived in piety, quietly and without ostentation, he was called from this life at the age of thirty-three, about the year 840, during the reign of the Iconoclast Theophilus. Not long after his burial, his grave became a fountain of unending miracles, as God revealed the virtue that Eudocimus had striven to hide; when his grave was later opened, his body was found incorrupt. His holy relics were translated to Constantinople." (Great Horologion)

Righteous Joseph of Arimathea (1st c.)

The "noble Joseph" was a secret follower of Christ and a wealthy member of the Jewish Sanhendrin (ruling council); it was he who provided Christ's tomb. When his faith became known he was driven from the Sanhendrin, from the synagogues, and from the Holy Land, and traveled through many lands, proclaiming the Gospel of Christ. According to some accounts he eventually reached England, where he reposed in peace.

Day 31-Jul-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 11:31-12:6; Matthew 18:1-11
31 If we discerned ourselves, we would not be judged, 32 but when we are judged, we are chastised by the Lord, so that we may not be condemned with the world.
33 Therefore, my brethren, when you come together for the Meal, wait for one another.
34 But anyone who is hungry should eat at home, in fear that your coming together might be for judgment.
Other matters, I will set in order when I come.
12 The works of the Spirit Now concerning spiritual [gifts],c brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant.
2 You know that when you were Gentiles, you were enticed and led away to those mute idols.
3 Therefore, I want you to understand that no one speaking by God's Spirit can says, 'Jesus is accursed.
No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit.
4 Now, there are various kinds of gifts, but it is the same Spirit.
5 There are various kinds of service, and the same Lord.
6 There are various kinds of works, but it is the same God who works all things in all.

Gospel Reading:
18 At that time, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who then is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?' 2 Jesus called a little child to himself and set him in their midst.
3 He then said, 'Amen, I tell you that unless you change and become as little children, you will in no way enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.
4 But whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.
5 Whoever receives such a little child in my Name receives me, 6 but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be better for such a person that a huge millstone be hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.
7 Woe to the world because of occasions of stumbling! Such occasions are bound to come, but woe to the one through whom the occasion does come! 8 If your

hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off, and throw it away from you! It is better for you to enter into life maimed or crippled rather than to have two hands or two feet and yet be cast into eternal fire.
9 If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it away from you.
It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than to be cast into the Gehennaa of fire having two eyes.
10 Do not despise any of these little ones, for I tell you that in heaven, their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.
11 For the Son of Man has come to save the lost.

Day 01-Aug-2023 Tuesday

Dormition of the Mother of God fast begins, Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Procession of the Precious Wood of the Life-giving Cross of the Lord (1164)

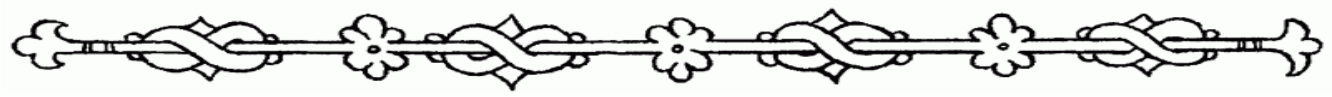
First of the three "Feasts of the Saviour" in August. Beginning of the Dormition Fast.
The Procession was established in the time of the Emperor Manuel Paleologos. In Constantinople, the wood of the Cross was brought forth from the Imperial Treasury on July 31 and placed on the altar of the Great Church, where it remained until the Dormition feast, being carried in procession every day for the people's veneration.
Holy Seven Maccabees, their mother Solomonia, and their teacher Eleazar (168 BC)

The story of the Maccabees, and their heroic struggle to free the Hebrew nation from the godless rule of Antiochus Epiphanes, is told in the Old Testament books of the Maccabees. (If your Bible does not contain these books, get one that does!) The wicked king once commanded all the Jews to eat pork, in violation of the Law of Moses. The seven pious youths, together with their teacher Eleazar and their mother Solomonia, were arrested and, when all of them refused to transgress the Law, were subjected to the cruelest tortures. Eleazar died first, by burning, then each of the youths, from the eldest to the youngest. All stood firm in their faith until the end. When Solomonia saw her youngest son, a mere

boy, seized for burning, she threw herself into the fire, commending her soul to God. This was in the year 168 BC.

St Nicholas, enlightener of Japan (1912)

Born in Russia in 1836, he became one of the great Orthodox missionaries of modern times. As a boy, he resolved to become a missionary in the far East. With the counsel and blessing of Bishop Innocent of Siberia and Alaska, he went to Japan in 1861 and joined a small Russian mission there. Though the mission's official purpose was to minister to the Russian consular community, the consul-general who invited Hieromonk Nikolai hoped to bring the light of the Orthodox Faith to the Japanese people as well. Realizing that he could only hope to convert the Japanese people if they understood one another well, Fr Nikolai immersed himself in the study of Japanese thought, culture and language. Over the course of his life he translated most of the Bible and most of the Orthodox services into Japanese, and became a fluent speaker of the language. He encountered much resistance: Preaching of Christian doctrine was officially banned in Japan, and a Samurai once approached him with the words "Foreigners must die!" It was this same Samurai who later became his first Japanese priest. In 1880 he was elevated to Bishop of Japan. During the Russo-Japanese war he remained in Japan and labored successfully to overcome nationalist strife that might have harmed or destroyed the Church in Japan. He encouraged all his Japanese faithful to pray for the Japanese armed forces, though he explained that as a Russian he could not do so, and excluded himself from all public services for the duration of the war. He sent Russian-speaking Japanese priests to the prison camps to minister to Russian prisoners of war. At the time of his repose in 1912, after forty-eight years in Japan, St Nikolai left a Cathedral, eight churches, more than 400 chapels and meeting houses, 34 priests, 8 deacons, 115 lay catechists, and 34,110 Orthodox faithful. The Church of Japan is now an autonomous Orthodox Church under the mantle of the Moscow Patriarchate.



Day 01-Aug-2023 Tuesday

Dormition of the Mother of God fast begins, Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 12:12-26; Matthew 18:18-22; 19:1-2, 13-15
12 Just as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body (though many,) form one body; so also is Christ.
13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, both Jews and Greeks, slaves or free; and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.
14 For the body is not one member, but many.
15 If the foot would say, 'Because I am not the hand, I am not part of the body,' it would still be part of the body.
16 If the ear would say, 'Because I am not the eye, I am not part of the body,' it would still be part of the body.
17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? Or if the whole body were hearing, where would the smelling be? 18 But now, God has set the members of the body, each one of them, just as he desired.
19 If they were all one member, where would the body be? 20 But now, they are many members, but [still] one body.
21 The eye cannot tell the hand, 'I have no need of you,' or again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.
22 In fact, the members of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable!
23 The members of the body which we think less honorable, we clothe with greater honor while our less respectable members are treated with greater respect, 24 although our more presentable parts have no such need.
But God put the body together, giving more abundant honor to the inferior part, 25 so that there should be no division in the body.
Instead, the members should have the same care for one another.
26 When one member suffers, all the members suffer with it, and when one member is glorified, all the members rejoice with it.

Gospel Reading:
18 Amen, I tell you that whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven.
19 Again, I tell you that if two of you will agree on earth concerning anything they will ask, it will be done for them by my Father who is in heaven.
20 Indeed, where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there I am among them.
21 Then Peter came forward and asked Jesus,'Lord, how often shall I forgive my

brother who sins against me? Until seven times?' 22 Jesus said to him, 'I do not tell you until seven times, but seventy times seven! 19 When Jesus had finished [speaking] these words, he departed from Galilee and arrived at the borders of Judea, beyond the Jordan.
2 Great crowds followed him, and he healed them there.
13 Then, little children were brought to him so that he may lay his hands on them and pray.
The disciples began to rebuke the people, 14 but Jesus said, 'Allow the little children and do not forbid them to come to me, for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to ones like these.
15 He laid his hands on them, and departed from that place.

Day 02-Aug-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Translation of the relics of the Protomartyr and Archdeacon Stephen (428)

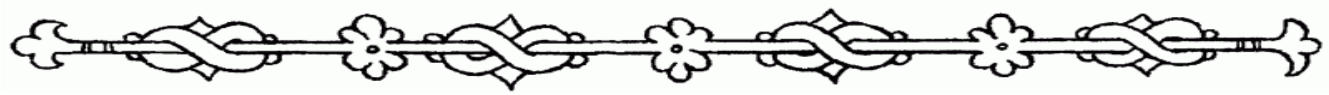
After the First Martyr Stephen was stoned to death, his body was left for the dogs; but his teacher Gamaliel had his body secretly taken to a place outside Jerusalem and buried by night. About the year 427, a Fr Lucian, the parish priest near the place, was told in a dream where the relics of the Protomartyr were buried. He told Patriarch John of Jerusalem, and they went together to the place revealed. Digging there they found a box labeled with the word "Stephen" in Aramaic letters. They took the sacred relics to Jerusalem in solemn procession.

Hieromartyr Stephen, Pope of Rome (257), and those with him

As Bishop of Rome from 254 to 257, he battled the Novatian heresy. By his prayers he once healed Lucilla, the daughter of the Roman tribune Nemesius; for this both father and daughter were baptized into Christ. Saint Stephen and twelve of his priests were beheaded during a celebration of the Liturgy, during the reign of Valerian.

Blessed Basil of Moscow, fool-for-Christ (1552)

At the age of sixteen, he took up the podvig of folly for Christ, in which he continued for seventy-two years, living to the age of eighty-eight. He was homeless, barefood and dressed in tatters, wandering the streets of Moscow. Though mocked by many, he spoke to strangers of their secret sins, rebuked nobles for their hard-heartedness, and slowly became known as a Saint. Tsar Ivan and the Metropolitan of Moscow attended his funeral. He was buried in the church in Moscow that now bears his name.



Day 02-Aug-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 13:4-14:5; Matthew 20:1-16
4 Love is patient and is kind; love does not envy.
Love does not brag, it is not proud, 5it does not behave inappropriately, it is not self-oriented.
c [Love] does not take offence and does not keep track of evil, 6 it does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth.
7 [Love] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
8 Love never fails.
But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.
9 For we know [only] in part, and we prophesy [only] in part; 10 but when what is complete comes, then what is incomplete will be done away with.
11 When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child.
Now that I have become fullgrown, I have put away childish things.
12 For now, we see in a mirror, dimly,a but then we shall see face to face.
Now, I know [only] in part, but then, I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.
13 But now, faith, hope, and love remain: these three, and the greatest of these is love.
14 About tongues and prophecy: personal and communal edification Pursue love, and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially so that you may prophesy.
2 For whoever speaks in another tongue does not speak to human beings but to God; and no one understands, but such a one speaks mysteries in [the] spirit.
3 Whoever prophesies speaks to others for their edification, exhortation, and consolation.
4 Whoever speaks in another tongue edifies himself [only], but the one who prophesies edifies the Church.
5 Indeed, I desire to have all of you speak in other tongues, and even more that you would prophesy.
For the one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless the one who speaks in tongues also interprets, so that the Church may be edified.

Gospel Reading:
20 1'The Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who was the master of a household

and who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.
2 After agreeing with the laborers for a [salary of one] denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard.
3 [Later], he went out when it was about the third hourb and saw other men standing idle in the marketplace.
4 He told them, 'You too should go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.
And so, they went their way.
5 Again, he went out when it was about the sixth and the ninth hour,c and did the same thing.
6 About the eleventh hour, he went out and still found others standing idle.
He asked them, 'Why do you stand here all day, doing nothing?
7 They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us! The master told them, 'You too should go into the vineyard, and you will receive whatever is right.
8 When evening came, the lord of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning from the last to the first.
9 When those who were hired at about the eleventh hour came, they each received a denarius.
10 Now, when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more, but they each likewise received one denarius.
11 W hen they received it, they grumbled against the master of the household, 12 saying: 'These last [workers] have spent one hour, and yet you have made them equal to us, who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat! 13 But the master answered to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong! Did you not agree with me for one denarius?
14 Take what is yours, and go your way.
What if I wish to give to this last one just as much as to you!
15 Is it not lawful for me to do what I want with what I own? Or is your eye evil, because I am good?
16 And so, the last will be first, and the first last! Indeed, many are called, but few are chosen.

Day 03-Aug-2023 Thursday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Sts Isaac, Dalmatus and Faustus, ascetics of the Dalmatian Monastery, Constantinople (5th c.)

St Isaac is also commemorated May 30; see his life there. St Dalmatus was a soldier in the Imperial army, but along with his son Faustus left all to become a monk at the monastery founded by St Isaac. He was present at the Third Ecumenical Council at Ephesus in 431; there he labored zealously for the Orthodox faith against Patriarch Nestorius. He was made Archimandrite of all the monasteries in Constantinople, and reposed in peace, having lived for more than eighty years.

Holy Myrrh-bearer Salome

She was the mother of the Apostles James and John, the wife of Zebedee, and the daughter of Joseph the Betrothed, who was a widower when he became betrothed to the Mother of God. She was a disciple of the Lord and one of the Myrrh-bearing women who first brought tidings of the Resurrection to the world.

Our Holy Father Antony the Roman (1148)

He was born in Rome in 1086 to wealthy and pious parents. When the Roman Church broke away from the Orthodox around that time, those who continued to uphold Orthodoxy, Antony among them, were persecuted. Antony gave away his worldly possessions and fled to a small rocky island in the sea, where he spent fourteen months in asceticism. During this time, the island miraculously floated like a ship to Novgorod. There, Archbishop Nikita received the young monk and helped him to build a church to the holy Theotokos, which in time became a monastery. St Anthony served there as abbot for many years, reposing in peace in 1148.

Day 03-Aug-2023 Thursday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 14:6-19; Matthew 20:17-28
6 But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what profit is there for
you unless I speak either by way of revelation, knowledge, prophesying, or
teaching? 7 Consider things without life but giving a voice, such as a pipe or a
harp: if they did not give a distinction in the sounds, how would anyone know what
is being played? 8 For if the trumpet gave an uncertain sound, who would prepare
for war? 9 It is the same with you: if you do not utter words easy to understand,
how will people understand what is spoken? For you would be speaking into the
air! 10 As it is, there are many kinds of sounds in the world, and none of them is
without meaning.
11 But if I do not know the meaning of the sound, I would be as a foreigner to the
one speaking [in tongues] and vice-versa.
12 And so with you, since you are eager for spiritual gifts, try to excel in what
edifies the Church.
13 Therefore, the one who speaks in another tongue should pray that he may
[also] interpret, 14 because if I pray in another tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind
does not bear fruit.
15 What then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the mind.
I will sing with the spirit, and with the mind also.
16 Otherwise if you bless with the spirit, how will the one who is untrained say the
'Amen' at your giving of thanks, not knowing what are you saying? 17 You give
thanks well, no doubt about it, but the other person is not built up.
18 I give thanks to my God: I speak in tongues more than all of you.
19 However, in the Church, I would rather speak five words with my mind than ten
thousand words in another tongue, in order to instruct others.

Gospel Reading:
17 As Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the Twelve disciples aside, and
on the way he said to them,
18 'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to
the chief priests and the scribes.
They will condemn him to death,
19 and they will hand him over to the Gentiles to mock, scourge and crucify him.
And on the third day, he will be raised up.
Request from James and John – The great shall be the servant 20 Then the

mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, kneeling and asking a certain thing of him.
21 He said to her, 'What do you want?' She said to him, 'Command that these, my two sons, may sit, one on your right hand, and one on your left hand, in your Kingdom.
22 But Jesus answered, 'You do not know what you are asking! Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink,a and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?' They said to him, 'We are able!' 23 Jesus answered, 'You will indeed drink my cup and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with, but to sit on my right and on [my] left hand is not mine to give! It is [reserved] for whom it has been prepared by my Father.
24 When the ten heard [about] this, they were upset with the two brothers.
25 However, Jesus called them together and said, 'You know that the rulers of the nations lord it over them, and great ones make their authority felt.
26 But it shall not be so among you! Instead, whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant.
27 Whoever desires to be first among you shall be your servant, 28 even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.
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Day 04-Aug-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Seven Youths (the "Seven Sleepers") of Ephesus (250 & 5th c.)

During a persecution of Christians under the Emperor Decius, these seven Christian youths hid themselves in a cave outside Ephesus. When they were discovered, their persecutors sealed them in the cave to die; but God instead sent them a miraculous, life-preserving sleep. There they rested for about two hundred years. In the time of the Emperor Theodosius the Younger (408-450), a heresy that denied the bodily Resurrection of the dead began to trouble the people. The Emperor prayed God to reveal the truth to the people. At this time, some shepherds removed the stones blocking the cave in order to build a sheep-pen. They discovered the seven youths, who awoke in full health and told their miraculous story. The miracle was told throughout the empire, and the Emperor himself came to Ephesus and spoke with the youths. A week later, they again fell asleep, this time in death.

Repose of Metropolitan Anthony (Bloom) of Sourozh (2003) (July 22 OC)

Day 04-Aug-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 14:26-40; Matthew 21:12-14, 17-20
26 What is it then, brethren? When you come together, each one of you has a psalm, a teaching, a revelation, a [saying in] tongue, or an interpretation.
Let all these things be done to build each other up.
27 If someone speaks in another tongue, let it be two or at the most three of them, one at a time; and then someone should interpret.
28 But if there is no interpreter, the one who speaks in tongues should remain silent in the Church; and let him speak to himself and to God.
29 Let the prophets speak, two or three of them, and then let the others ponder on what was said.
30 But if a revelation is made to another sitting by, the first speaker should then keep silent.
31 Certainly, all of you can prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and be exhorted.
32 The prophetic spirit is to be under the prophets' control, 33 for God is not a God of confusion, but of peace.
As is done in all the Churches of the saints, 34 women should remain silent in the Churches, for it has not been permitted for them to speak as they are to be under authority, as the law also says.
35 If they desire to learn about something, let them ask their own husbands at home, for it is not fitting that a woman should speak in the Church.
36 Do you think that it was from you that the word of God went out? Or did it come to you alone? 37 If any man thinks himself to be a prophet or someone spiritual, let him recognize the things which I write to you: these are the commandment of the Lord.
38 But the ignorant is truly ignorant! 39 Therefore, brethren, have an intense desire to prophesy and do not forbid speaking in tongues, 40 but let all things be done decently and in order.
Gospel reading:

12 Jesus entered into the temple of God and drove out all of those who did business there.
He overthrew the table of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves.
13 He said to them, 'It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of thieves!' 14 The blind and the lame came to him in the

temple, and he healed them.
17 He left them, went out of the city to Bethany and spent the night there.
18 In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he was hungry.
19 Seeing a fig tree by the roadside, he came to it, and found nothing on it but leaves.
He said to it, 'Let there be no fruit from you, unto the ages!' Immediately the fig tree withered away! 20 When the disciples saw it, they marveled and asked, 'How did the fig tree wither away at once?'

Day 05-Aug-2023 Saturday

Fast Day /oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Forefeast of the Transfiguration
Martyr Eusignius of Antioch (362)

He was a soldier in the Imperial army beginning under the pagan Emperor Maximian. He was a general under Constantine, and saw the Cross that appeared to the Emperor. After sixty years of military service, he retired to his home town and devoted himself to prayer, fasting and good works. A townsman, angry with a judgment that Eusignius had made to settle a dispute, denounced him to Julian the Apostate as a Christian. Summoned before Julian, he vigorously rebuked the Emperor for his apostasy from the Faith; for this he was beheaded, in advanced old age, in 362.

Holy Hieromartyr Fabian, Pope of Rome (250)

He was born in Rome and became a humble village priest; but when he was attending the election of a new Pope, a white dove was seen to descend on him and he was chosen to be Pope. Though humble and gentle, he was fearless for the faith, gathering the bodies of the martyrs, giving them burial, and building churches and shrines over their relics. According to the Prologue, he baptized the Emperor Philip and his son, also named Philip, as well as the senator Pontius; thus there were Christian emperors before St Constantine the Great. When Decius became Emperor, the persecution of Christians returned with terrible force, and Fabian was beheaded.

Righteous Nonna (374), Mother of St Gregory the Theologian

In her own lifetime she was a wonderworker through her holy prayers. She brought her husband back from idolatry to Christian faith; he later became bishop of Nazianzus. Her son Gregory's profound and devout writings bespeak the Christian upbringing she gave him. By her prayers she once saved St Gregory from perishing in a storm. She was a deaconess, and reposed in peace in 374.

Day 05-Aug-2023 Saturday

Fast Day /oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.
Readings of the day: Romans 14:6-9; Matthew 15:32-39
6 The one who observes the day should observe it 'to the Lord;' and the one who
does not observe it should do so 'to the Lord.
The one who eats should eat 'to the Lord' because he gives thanks to God!
Likewise, the one who does not eat should do so 'to the Lord' because he [also]
gives thanks to God! 7 Indeed, we do not live selfishly and we do not die for
ourselves.
8 In fact, if we live, we live 'to the Lord;' or if we die, we die 'to the Lord.
Therefore, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.
9 It is for this purpose that Christ died, rose, and lived again, so that he might be
Lord of both the dead and the living.

Gospel Reading:

32 Jesus called his disciples and said, 'I have compassion on the crowd because
they have remained with me for three days now and they have nothing to eat.
I do not want to send them away hungry, or they might faint on the way.
33 The disciples said to him, 'But where should we get so many loaves in a
deserted place in order to satisfy such a great multitude?' 34 Jesus asked them,
'How many loaves do you have?' They replied, 'Seven, and a few small fish.
35 Jesus then told the people to sit down on the ground 36 and took the seven
loaves and the fish.
He gave thanks, broke them, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples
distributed [the food] to the multitudes.
37 Everyone ate and was satisfied.
They gathered up seven baskets full of the broken pieces that were left over.
38 Those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children.
39 Then, Jesus sent the people away, got into the boat, and came to the borders
of Magdala.

Day 06-Aug-2023 Sunday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

The Holy Transfiguration of Our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ

Epistle Reading: St. Peter's Second Universal Letter 1:10-19
BRETHREN, be more zealous to confirm your call and election, for if you do this you will never fall; so there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Therefore I intend always to remind you of these things, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to arouse you by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. And I will see to it that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.
For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,' we heard this voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have the prophetic word made more sure. You will do well to pay attention to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 17:1-9
At that time, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain apart. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is well that we are here; if you wish, I will make three booths here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.' He was still speaking, when lo, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.' When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces, and were filled with awe. But Jesus came and touched

them, saying, 'Rise, and have no fear.' And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, 'Tell no one the vision, until the Son of man is raised from the dead.'

Apolytikion

You were transfigured on the Mount, Christ God revealing Your glory to Your disciples, insofar as they could comprehend. Illuminate us sinners also with Your everlasting light, through the intercessions of the Theotokos. Giver of light, glory to You.

In the third year of His preaching, the Lord Jesus often spoke to His disciples of His approaching passion, and also of His glory following His suffering on the Cross. So that His impending passion would not totally weaken His disciples, and so that no one would fall away from Him, He, the All-wise, wanted to show them a portion of His divine glory before His passion. For that reason, He took Peter, James and John with Him and went by night to Mount Tabor, and was there transfigured before them: *His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light* (Matthew 17:2). Moses and Elias, the great
Old Testament prophets, also appeared beside Him. Seeing this, His disciples were stunned. Peter said: *Lord, it is good for us to be here: if Thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias* (Matthew 17:4). While Peter still spoke, Moses and Elias departed, and a bright cloud overshadowed the Lord and His disciples, and there came a voice from the cloud saying: *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him* (Matthew 17:5). Hearing the voice, the disciples fell face down on the ground as though dead, and remained that way, prostrate in fear, until the Lord came to them and said: *Arise, and be not afraid* (Matthew 17:7). Why did the Lord take only three disciples onto Tabor, and not all? Because Judas was not worthy to behold the divine glory of the Teacher, Whom he would betray; and the Lord did not want to leave him alone at the foot of the mountain, so that the betrayer would not, because of this, justify his betrayal. Why was our Lord transfigured on a mountain and not in a valley? So as to teach us two virtues: love of labor and godly thoughts – for climbing to the heights requires labor, and the heights themselves represent the elevation of our thoughts to the things of God. Why was our Lord transfigured at night? Because the night is more suitable than the day for prayer and godly thoughts; and the night, by its darkness, conceals all the beauty of the earth, and reveals the beauty of the starry heavens. Why did Moses and Elias appear? In order to destroy the Jewish fallacy that Christ was one of the prophets – Elias or Jeremiah or some other. That is why He appeared as a King, above the prophets, and that is why Moses and Elias appeared as His servants. Until then, our Lord

had manifested His divine power many times to the disciples; but on Mount Tabor He manifested His Divine Nature. This vision of His Divinity, and the hearing of the heavenly witness to His being the Son of God, must have served the disciples in the days of the Lord’s passion – in the strengthening of a steadfast faith in Him and in His final victory.

ON THE TRANSFIGURATION

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Today our Lord's human nature was transfigured by the Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father, Whose voice witnessed to the Son's divine nature.
We are perhaps reminded of another Feast of the Church taken from the Holy Scriptures, where the divinity of Christ was also witnessed to by the Father and the Spirit proceeding from the Father - Theophany, the Baptism of Christ. Both these feasts have a great prominence in our Church, which has been lost outside Her, where people do not believe in the words of the Holy Scripture, that the Holy Spirit proceeds from God the Father alone.

This Feast shows us firstly that the human and divine natures of Christ are united in One Person, secondly that therefore there is no unity without the Holy Spirit, and thirdly that our Saviour is Lord over Life and Death, for Moses, who died, worships Him, and Elijah, who did not die, also worships Him.

Today, however, I would like to point out an aspect of this Feast which is often overlooked: Mt Tabor, the 'mountain' where the Transfiguration occurred. This Mt Tabor is for us a figure of repentance.
We note that, like the disciples, in order for us to see the transfiguration or to hope to be transfigured ourselves, we will first have to climb up, to mount, from our present condition. Otherwise any transfiguration or change for the better in our lives is impossible.

Now it is interesting that pilgrims who have been blessed to go to Mt Tabor and their photographs show us that Mt Tabor is not a mountain at all. It is rather a long, sloping hill with many obstacles, rocks and boulders, in the path of those who ascend it.
And our transfiguration or salvation is like Mt Tabor. However hard we try, we will not be guaranteed salvation through a swift if arduous climb today. Salvation takes a lifetime, it is a long climb up a long slope, which is why the Lord gives most of us so long to live. Salvation is a long struggle which requires determination and perseverance, patient longsuffering.

Our spiritual progress is then not sudden and dramatic. And there are many

obstacles in our path in our daily struggle. To pick up our prayerbooks in the morning and again in the evening is a struggle and there are always obstacles in our path to even this: meals to prepare, trains to catch, phones that ring. Church life is indeed made up of little sacrifices, obstacles overcome. There are prayers to say, fasts to be kept, a donation to be made, the washing-up to be done, flowers bought, the church cleaned, a choir rehearsal to go to, a vigil service to attend, a confession prepared.

As we come now towards the end of the Church's Year, we may well ask ourselves what the little sacrifices we have made since this Feast last year are . How far have we ascended up our own Mt Tabor? How have we changed over this last year? What have we done to lead a better life since then? How have we improved? What have we given God that we did not give Him before? It is this that we call progress: in what way am I a better Orthodox Christian than a year ago?

In our faith we are called to struggle daily, whatever the rocks or boulders in our way, whether they are pride or selfishness, lust or discouragement, envy or judging of others, we have to struggle to ascend our personal Mt Tabor, we have to fight for our personal transfiguration. That is why it is so important to come to confession and communion.

If we do not do this, then the Church will move away from us. For we can both go up and go down a slope. We can spiritually progress, but we can also spiritually regress. We can be transfigured by the love of God or we can be disfigured by the love of sin. And like progress, regress is not sudden and dramatic, regress too is a slope, as we say, a slippery slope.

Let us therefore take heed and give God what He really wants from us - our hearts and minds spiritually progressing.
Amen.

Day 06-Aug-2023 Sunday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Sunday walking on water
1 Corinthians 3:9-17; Matthew 14:22-34
9 Indeed, we are God's co- workers! You are God's field,a God's building.
10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder, I laid a foundation, and another builds on it.
But let everyone be careful how he builds on it! 11 As it is, no one can lay any other foundation than the one that has [already] been laid, which is Jesus Christ.
12 But as one builds on that foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or stubble; 13 each person's work will be revealed.
Certainly, the Day will make it manifest, because it is revealed in fire; and the fire will test everyone's work.
14 If what someone has built on the foundation remains, then a reward shall be received.
15 [On the other hand], if someone's work is burned, it will be lost, but that person shall be saved, as through fire.
16 Do you not know that your bodies are a sanctuary of God, and that God's Spirit lives in you? 17 If anyone destroys God's sanctuary, God will destroy him because God's sanctuary is holy, and this is what you are!

Gospel Reading: Sunday walking on water: Matthew 14:22-34

22 Immediately after this, Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and told them to go ahead of him to the other side, while he would send the crowds away.
23 After he had sent the people away, he went up into the mountain by himself in order to pray.
When evening came, he was there alone.
24 But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, distressed by the waves, because the wind was against it.
25 In the fourth watch of the night, Jesus came to them, walking on the sea.
a 26 When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled and said, 'It is a ghost!' and they cried out in fear.
27 But at once, Jesus spoke to them, saying 'Take heart! It is I! Do not be afraid.
28 Peter answered him and said, 'Lord, if it is you, tell me to come to you upon the waters.
29 And Jesus said, 'Come!' Peter stepped down from the boat and walked on the

waters to come to Jesus.
30 But when he saw that the wind was strong, he became afraid and beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, 'Lord, save me!' 31 Immediately, Jesus stretched out his hand, took hold of Peter, and said, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?' 32 When they got up into the boat, the wind ceased. 33 Those who were in the boat came [forward] and expressed adoration toe him, saying, 'You are truly the Son of God!' 34 When they had crossed over [the lake], they arrived in the land of Gennesaret.

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING

In today's Epistle reading, St Paul reminds us of the tremendous gift and privilege that has been given to us as baptised members of Christ's Holy Church.
The Spirit of God now dwells within us, and Christ has become the foundation on which we build our lives, a foundation that cannot be shaken or taken away.
However, while we should rejoice in that fact, we must not become complacent.
Although the foundation is there, and we have been given all we need to build upon it, what we choose to build remains up to us.
The foundation might be unshakable, but what good is that to us if we build upon it a house of cards that will come tumbling down at the slightest gust of wind? And it is not just a question of effort, but of whether that effort is well spent (building a house of cards is difficult and time consuming precisely because of how unstable it is!). As the Psalmist says, 'Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it" (Psal. 127:1). In order for the house to stand, we have to be God's co-labourers (Theou synergoi), and the story told in today's Gospel reading is a perfect illustration of precisely this notion of synergy with God.
Christ, the eternal Word of God made flesh, is seen walking on the water.
St Peter calls out to him and says, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water".
Peter steps out of the boat onto the sea, and begins to walk.
At that moment, his foundation was not the water under his feet, which could not have supported him, but rather his faith in Christ.
When we are joined to Christ we become, as the same Apostle says in his second

epistle, 'partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4), and this is what allowed Peter at that moment to do what the Lord had done and walk on the water.
We saw this also when we celebrated the Transfiguration of the Lord, and Peter and the other two Apostles saw Jesus on Mount Tabor shining with the uncreated light.
The Fathers tell us that it was not Christ who was transfigured at that moment, but rather the eyes of the Apostles which were opened to see Jesus as he truly is; they were granted some form of participation in his divine energies.
However, although this possibility of participation is a gift freely given, it requires this same cooperation, the synergy that Paul mentions.
The Lord did not withdraw from Peter, he did not take back the gift given to him. Rather it was Peter who took his eyes off the Lord, saw the storm, became afraid and lost faith.
He stepped off the Rock, which is Christ, and back into the sea and thus immediately began to sink.
The foundation has been laid, the tools are at our disposal, but as for what we build and whether we make use of those tools, the choice is ours.
As we work to build our lives, do we keep our gaze fixed on Christ and with him build things that will last into eternity, or do we turn aside to focus on the storm and build something that will only last as long as the temporary concerns and troubles of this life?
More importantly, when we do go wrong, do we cry 'Lord, help me", as did Peter, or do we choose to drown in our self-reliance?

Day 07-Aug-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Hieromartyr Narcissus, Patriarch of Jerusalem

Martyr Dometius of Persia (363) and two disciples

"Born a pagan in Persia in the time of the Emperor Constantine, he came to know the Christian faith as a young man, forsook his paganism and received baptism. He was so enchanted with the true Faith that he left all worldly things and became a monk in a monastery near the town of Nisibis. He lived among the brethren for some time, then withdrew into silence, going to Archimandrite Urbel, of whom it is said that, for sixty years, he never ate anything cooked. Urbel made him a deacon, but, when he wanted to make him a priest, Dometius fled to a distant mountain and settled in a cave there. He attained such perfection through fasting, prayer, vigils and meditation that he was able to heal the sick. When Julian the Apostate came to that place, he heard of Dometius and sent men to wall him up alive in the came, with two of his disciples. Thus died this saint of God, in 363, and went to the Kingdom of God." (Prologue). The Great Horologion says that Dometius and his disciples were stoned to death.

Holy Martyrs Marinus the Soldier and Asterius the Senator (260)

Marinus was a soldier in the Roman army, serving in Caesarea in Palestine. During a persecution under the Emperor Gallienus, he was arrested and beheaded for his Christian faith. The senator Asterius, also a Christian, was present at his execution. Asterius took off his senatorial toga, wrapped the martyr's body in it, and carried the holy body away to bury it. For this he too was beheaded.

Our Holy Father Or (Horus) of the Thebaid (390)

He was a native of Egypt; his name is that of one of the Egyptian gods. He fled to the desert to live as a hermit, but after many years he became a well-known spiritual guide and founded several monastic communities. A first-hand account of him, by Rufinus, says 'In appearance he is like an angel of God; an old man of ninety with a long snow-white beard. The impression left by his presence is delightful. His gaze is imbued with more-than-human radiance.' He received communion every day. So detached was he from the world that his disciples once had to remind him that Pascha had come. Hearing this, he went outside, raised his hands to heaven and prayed without ceasing for three days. When he had done he said to his disciples 'This is the monk's celebration of Pascha: the lifting up of the mind to unity with God.' He reposed in peace at a great age.

Our Holy Father Pimen the Much-Ailing (1110)

"He was sickly from his youth, and from his youth desired monasticism. Brought to the Monastery of the Caves for healing, he remained there till his death. He prayed more for sickness than for health. One night, angels appeared to him and tonsured him as a monk, telling him at the same time that he would be sick until his death, and would be healed at that moment. And so it was; he lay sick for twenty years, working wonders even during his lifetime and being possessed of a rare gift of discernment. At the time of his death, he got up from his bed completely healed, immediately prepared his grave and entered into rest in the Lord, in the year 1110." (Prologue)

Day 07-Aug-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 15:12-19; Matthew 21:18-22

12 Now, if Christ is preached and we preach that he has been raised from the dead, how is it that some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?
13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised! 14 If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is also in vain.
15 Yes, we are found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified concerning God that he raised up Christ (but if God did not raise him up, then the dead are not raised).
16 Truly, if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised! 17 If Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain, and you are still in your sins.
18 Moreover, those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.
19 If it is only in this life that we have hoped in Christ, we are the most pathetic of all human beings!

Gospel Reading:

18 In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he was hungry.
19 Seeing a fig tree by the roadside, he came to it, and found nothing on it but leaves.
He said to it, 'Let there be no fruit from you, unto the ages!' Immediately the fig tree withered away! 20 When the disciples saw it, they marveled and asked, 'How did the fig tree wither away at once?' 21Jesus answered them, 'Amen, I tell you that if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you told this mountain 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it would be done! 22 Whatever you ask in prayer, if you believe, you will receive them all!'

Day 08-Aug-2023 Tuesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy New Martyrs Triantaphillus and Anastasius

St Emilian the Confessor, bishop of Cyzicus (820)

He was one of the bishops summoned by the Patriarch Nikephoros to defend the veneration of the holy icons against the Emperor Leo the Armenian. For this reason he was sent into exile around 815, and after many sufferings for his faithful confession, reposed in exile in 820.

St Myron the Wonderworker, Bishop of Crete (350)

He was a widowed farmer who, though poor, shared the produce of his farm freely with the needy. Once he found some thieves stealing his grain. Without saying who he was, he helped the thieves fill their sacks and make their escape. His virtue became known, and he was ordained to the priesthood, then consecrated bishop. In his own lifetime he was known as a great wonderworker. He reposed in peace.

St Gregory of Sinai (Mt Athos) (1346)

One of the great ascetics, hesychasts and spiritual teachers of the Church, he did much to restore the knowledge and practice of Orthodox hesychasm. He became a monk at Mt Sinai. He traveled to Mt Athos to learn more of Orthodox spiritual prayer and contemplation, but found that these were almost lost even on the Holy Mountain. The only true, holy hesychast he found there was St Maximos of Kapsokalyvia (Maximos the hut-burner, January 13). Maximos lived a life of reclusion in crude shelters; from time to time he would burn his hut and move to a new one, so as not to become attached even to that poor earthly dwelling. For this, he was scorned as a madman by the other monks. St Gregory upbraided the monks and told them that Maximos was the only true hesychast among them, thus beginning a reform of spiritual life on the Holy Mountain. He spent time teaching mental prayer in all the monasteries of Mt Athos, then traveled around Macedonia, establishing new monasteries. Some of his writings on prayer and asceticism can be found in the Philokalia. He reposed in peace in 1346.

Day 08-Aug-2023 Tuesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 15:29-38; Matthew 21:23-27

29 Otherwise, what is the point of being baptized to be as dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized to be on their side?
30 Why do we also stand in danger at every hour?
31 I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, that I die daily.
32 If I fought with animals at Ephesus for human purposes, what gain is there for me? If the dead are not raised, then 'let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.
d 33 Do not be deceived! 'Evil companionships corrupt good morals.
34 Wake up to righteousness and do not sin, for some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.
35 But someone will say, 'How are the dead raised?' and, 'With what kind of body do they return?' 36 You foolish one, even what you sow is not made alive unless it dies first.
37 What you sow, you do not sow [in] the shape that will be, but a bare grain, maybe of wheat, or of some other kind.
38 But God gives it a body even as it pleased him, and to each seed a body of its own.

Gospel Reading:

23 When he had come into the temple, the chief priests and the presbyters of the people came to him as he was teaching.
They asked, 'By what authority do you do these things? Who gave you this authority?' 24 Jesus answered them, 'I also will ask you one question and if you answer me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things.
25 The baptism of John, where was it from? From heaven or from men?' They reasoned among themselves, saying, 'If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' 26 But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the crowd because everyone considers John as a prophet.
27 So they answered Jesus: 'We do not know.
He also said to them, 'Then neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

Day 09-Aug-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Apostle Matthias (1st c.)

He was numbered among the Seventy. Then, when Judas who betrayed Christ had taken his own life, the disciples (120 men and women) convened to choose one who would take his place among the Twelve. They nominated two, Joseph (called Barsabas or Justus) and Matthias, then cast lots. The lot fell to Matthais, who henceforth was numbered among the Twelve (See Acts ch. 1). Accounts of his Apostolate after this vary. According to some, he preached the Gospel in Ethiopia and met his martyrdom there. According to others, after visiting Ethiopia he returned to Judea, where he was tried and condemned by Ananias the High Priest, and stoned to death, then beheaded.

Holy Martyr Anthony (2nd c.)

A native of Alexandria, he was brought before the pagan governor and tortured for his faith, but would not renounce Christ. Finally he was burned alive, but from the flames he called out: 'My beloved brethren, do not be enslaved by your bodies, but give thought to your souls, given to you by God and kin to God and to the heavenly powers.'

Day 09-Aug-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 16:4-12; Matthew 21:28-32
4 If it is appropriate for me to go also, they will accompany me.
5 But I will come to you when I have passed through Macedonia, since I have to go through Macedonia.
6 I may also stay with you, or even spend the winter, so that you may send me on my journey.
7 Truly, I do not wish to see you only in passing, but I hope to stay with you for a while, if the Lord permits.
8 But I will stay at Ephesus until Pentecost,
9 because a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.
10 Now, if Timothy comes, make sure that he has nothing to fear from you, for he does the work of the Lord as I do.
11 Therefore, let no one despise him, but set him on his way in peace, so that he may come to me; for I expect him with the brothers.
12 Now concerning Apollos, the brother: I strongly urged him to come to you with the brothers;b but it was not his desire to come now.
He will come when he has an opportunity.

Gospel Reading:
28 'But what do you think? A man had two sons.
He came to the first and said, 'Son, go work today in my vineyard.
29 The son answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he was sorry and went.
30 The father came to his second son, and said the same thing.
The son answered, 'I will go, sir,' but he did not go.
31 Which one of the two sons did the will of his father?' They replied, 'The first.
Jesus said to them, 'Amen, I tell you that tax collectors and prostitutes are entering into the Kingdom of God before you!
32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him.
After seeing this, you did not even repent and you did not believe him.

Day 10-Aug-2023 Thursday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Martyrs Archdeacon Laurence, Pope Sixtus, and others with them (258)

"This Saint, who was born in Spain, was the Archdeacon of the Church of Rome, caring for the sacred vessels of the Church and distributing money to the needy. About the year 257, a harsh persecution was raised up against the Christians by Valerian. Pope Sixtus, who was from Athens, was commanded to worship the idols, and refused; before his martyrdom by beheading, he committed to Laurence all the sacred vessels of the Church. When Laurence was arrested and brought before the Prefect, he was questioned concerning the treasures of the Church; he asked for three days' time to prepare them. He then proceeded to gather all the poor and needy, and presented them to the Prefect and said, "Behold the treasures of the Church." The Prefect became enraged at this and gave command that Laurence be racked, then scourged with scorpions (a whip furnished with sharp iron points — compare II Chron. 10:11), then stretched out on a red-hot iron grill. But the courageous athlete of Christ endured without groaning. After he had been burned on one side, he said, "My body is done on one side; turn me over on the other." And when this had taken place, the Martyr said to the tyrants, "My flesh is now well done, you may taste of it." And when he had said this, and had prayed for his slayers in imitation of Christ, he gave up his spirit on August 10, 258." (Great Horologion). His icon shows him stretched on the grill.

Day 10-Aug-2023 Thursday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 2 Corinthians 1:1-7; Matthew 21:43-46
1 Afflictions and blessings Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and
Timothy our brother, to the Church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints
who are throughout Achaia: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and
the Lord Jesus Christ! 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the Father of mercies and {a} God of all consolation;
4 who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who
are in any affliction, through the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by
God.
5 For as the sufferings of Christ overflow to us, even so our consolation also
overflows through Christ.
6 But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation.
If we are comforted, it is for your consolation which produces in you the patient
enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer.
7 Our hope for you is unshaken, knowing that, since you have a share in the
sufferings, you also have a share in the consolation.

Gospel Reading:
43 Therefore, I tell you that the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and
it will be given to a people bringing forth its fruit.
44 Whoever falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, and whoever it will fall on
will be scattered as dust.
c 45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived
that he had spoken about them.
46 They began to look for a way to arrest Jesus, but they feared the crowds
because the people considered him to be a prophet.

Day 11-Aug-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Martyr and Archdeacon Euplus of Catania (304)

He was a deacon from Catania in Sicily during the reign of Diocletian. During a persecution of Christians there, Euplus presented himself to the governor and proclaimed himself a Christian. While he was being tortured on the rack, the governor ordered him to worship Mars, Apollos, and Aeculapius, but he answered that he worshipped the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. He was beheaded in 304. His wonderworking relics are preserved in the village of Vico della Batonia near Naples.

The Holy Martyr Susanna the Virgin, and those with her (295-296)

She was the daughter of Gavinius, a Christian priest in Rome, and the niece of Pope Gaius. The Emperor Diocletian's adopted son Maximian wished to marry Susanna, but she had no desire to marry any one, least of all a pagan. The patricians Claudia and Maxima were sent to Susanna by the Emperor to present Maximian's suit; but instead she turned both of them, and all their households, to the Faith. The enraged Emperor had Claudia, Maxima and their families executed, then had Susanna herself beheaded. The Emperor's wife, Serena, was a secret Christian, and took Susanna's body secretly and buried it. Soon after this Susanna's father Gavinius and her uncle Pope Gaius also met martyrdom.

Saint Niphon, Patriarch of Constantinople (1508)

He was born in Greece and became a monk at a young age, spending many years in asceticism on the Holy Mountain. Against his desire, he was made Bishop of Thessalonika, then Patriarch of Constantinople. He was banished by the Sultan (the Prologue does not say why), served as archbishop in Wallachia for a time, then returned to Dionysiou monastery on the Holy Mountain, where he reposed at the age of ninety. He composed the 'Prayer at Departing' used in the funeral service.

Day 11-Aug-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 2 Corinthians 1:12-20; Matthew 22:23-33
12 Our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience.
We act in the world in holiness and sincerity of God (not in carnal wisdom but in the grace of God), and we do so more abundantly toward you.
13 We only write what you can read and acknowledge: I hope that you will accept [those things] to the end; 14 as you also received us in part.
I also hope that we are your boasting, even as you also are ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus.
15 In this confidence, I was determined to come first to you, so that you might have a double blessing.
16 I would then pass into Macedonia, and then again from Macedonia back to you to be sent on by you on my journey to Judea.
17 After making this plan, did I waver in my resolve? Or do I plan things in human way? For with me, 'Yes' should be 'yes' and 'No,' no.
18 But as God is faithful, our word to you was not 'Yes and no.
a' 19 Certainly, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, (who was preached among you by us, by me, Silvanus, and Timothy), was not 'Yes and no,' but in him is 'Yes.
20 However many the promises of God are, in him is the 'Yes.
And so, through him is the 'Amen,' to the glory of God, through us.
Gospel reading:

23 On that [same] day, Sadducees (those who say that there is no resurrection,) came to him.
They asked him [a question], 24 saying, 'Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies without having children, his brother shall marry his wife and have a posterity for his brother.
25 Now there were with us seven brothers.
The first married and died, and having no descendant he left his wife to his brother.
26 In the same way, the second also, and the third, to the seventh.
27 After them all, the woman also died.
28 In the resurrection therefore, which one of the seven brothers will have her as wife, for they all had her as wife?' 29 But Jesus answered them, 'You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures or the power of God.
30 For in the resurrection, peopled neither marry nor are given in marriage, but they are like angels a in heaven.
31 However, concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was

spoken to you by God, saying: 32 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?'b God is not the God of the dead,c but of the living!' 33 When the crowds heard it, they were astonished at his teaching.

Day 12-Aug-2023 Saturday

Fast Day /oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Martyrs Anicetas and Photius of Nicomedia (305)

These holy martyrs suffered victoriously in the year 305 (Prologue) or 288 (Great Horologion), during the reign of Diocletian, who visited Nicomedia to stir up a persecution of Christians there. Anicetas, one of the city governors, presented himself before the Emperor, boldly confessed his Christian faith, and denounced the worship of the idols. Anicetas was subjected to a series of cruelties: his tongue was cut out, but he miraculously continued to speak; he was thrown to a lion, but it refused to attack him; then he was savagely beaten with rods until his bones showed through his wounds. His nephew Photius, seeing his endurance of all these trials, ran forward, embraced his uncle, and declared to the Emperor that he too was a Christian. The Emperor ordered that he be beheaded immediately, but the executioner, raising his sword, gave himself such a wound that he died instead. After many tortures, the two were put in prison for three years, then brought out and cast into a fiery furnace, where they died, though their bodies were brought out of the flames intact.

Saint Anicetas is counted as one of the Holy Unmercenaries.

Hieromaryr Alexander, Bishop of Comana (3rd c.)

"He lived in the town of Comana near Neocaesarea as a simple charcoal-burner. When the Bishop of Comana died, St Gregory of Neocaesarea, the Wonderworker (Nov. 17), was invited to preside over the Council to choose a new bishop. At the Council there were both clergy and laymen. They were unable to come to agreement on one person, estimating the candidates they selected according to their outward worth and behaviour. St Gregory told them that they must not give so much weight to the outward impression as to the soul and the spiritual aptitude. Then some wag called out mockingly: 'Then let's choose Alexander the charcoal-burner as bishop!', and there was general laughter. St Gregory asked who this Alexander was. Thinking that his name would not have come up before the Council except by the providence of God, he commanded that he be brought. Being a charcoal-burner, he was black with soot and in rags, and his appearance provoked further mirth in the

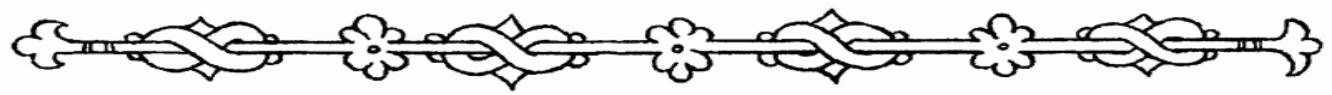
Council. Then Gregory took him aside and asked him to tell the truth about himself. Alexander told him that he had been a Greek philosopher, enjoying great honour and position, but that he had set it all aside, demeaned himself and made himself as a fool for Christ from the time that he had read and understood the Holy Scriptures. Gregory commanded that he be bathed and clad in new clothes, then went into the Council with him and, before them all, began to examine him in the Scriptures. All were filled with amazement at the wisdom and grace of Alexander's words, and were quite unable to recognize the former charcoal-burner in this wise man. With one voice, they chose him as bishop, and he received the love of his flock for his holiness, his wisdom and his goodness. He died a martyr for Christ under Diocletian." (Prologue)

Day 12-Aug-2023 Saturday

Fast Day /oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.
Readings of the day: Romans 15:30-33; Matthew 17:24-18:4
30 Now I beg you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, 31 so that I may be delivered from those who are disobedient in Judea and so that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints.
32 [Pray also] that I may come to you in joy by the will of God, and together with you, find rest.
33 May the God of peace be with you all! Amen.

Gospel Reading:

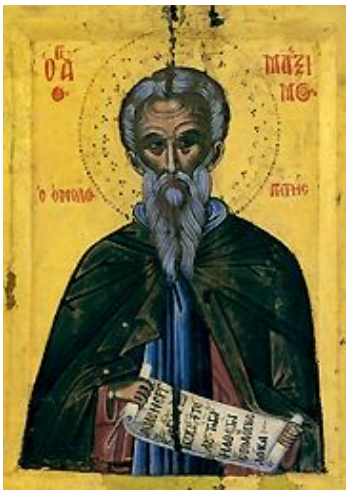
24 When they arrived in Capernaum, those who collected the temple tax came to Peter, and said, 'Does not your teacher pay the temple tax?' 25 He replied, 'Yes {he does}.
When he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, 'What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth receive toll or tribute? From their children, or from foreigners?' 26 Peter replied, 'From strangers!' Jesus said to him, 'Therefore, the children are exempt.
27 But in order not to cause them to stumble, go to the sea, cast a hook, and take up the first fish that comes up.
When you have opened its mouth, you will find a stater coin.
Take it, and give it to them for me and you.
8 At that time, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who then is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?' 2 Jesus called a little child to himself and set him in their midst.
3 He then said, 'Amen, I tell you that unless you change and become as little children, you will in no way enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.
4 But whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.



Day 13-Aug-2023 Sunday

Fast Day /oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Our Righteous Fathers Sergius, Stephanus, Castor and Palamonus
Leavetaking of Transfiguration
St Maximos the Confessor (662)



He was from a noble family in Constantinople, and became the private secretary of the Emperor Heraclius and his grandson Constans. But when the Monothelite heresy (that Christ possesses one divine will, rather than a divine and a human will) took hold in the Imperial court, the Saint could not bear to be surrounded by this error and left the court for the Monastery at Chrysopolis, where in time he became the abbot. From the monastery he continued to speak and write in defense of Orthodox belief. The Emperor Constans ordered him either to accept Monothelite belief or to cease speaking against it, but St Maximos would do neither. For this, his tongue was torn out, his right hand was cut off, and he was sent into exile, where he reposed in 662. He is also commemorated on January 21; see that day for a slightly fuller account.

St Tikhon of Zadonsk (1783)

He is one of the best-loved Saints of the Russian people. He was born into a very poor family in Novgorod province and received the baptismal name of Timothy. He went to seminary in Novgorod, where he excelled, later teaching Greek and other subjects. He was tonsured a monk at the age of thirty-four, receiving the monastic name of Tikhon. As his ascesis and wisdom became known, he quickly became eminent in the Church and in 1761 was made a bishop. In 1763 he was consecrated Bishop of Voronezh. After serving as bishop for about seven years, he retired to the monastery of Zadonsk, where he spent the remainder of his life. He devoted his "retirement" to prayer and the writing of books, producing a huge collection of writings that have earned him the name "the Russian Chrysostom." He reposed in peace in 1783 at the age of fifty-nine. Many miracles were wrought by him after his death, and he was soon proclaimed a Saint by the people. When his body was exhumed in 1845 (over sixty years later) to make way for a new church in Zadonsk, his relics were found to be whole and incorrupt; even his vestments were free from decay. He was officially glorified in 1863; some three hundred thousand pilgrims attended his glorification.

Holy Martyr Hippolytus of Rome and 18 Martyrs with him (258)

He was the pagan jailkeeper who guarded St Laurence (see August 10); seeing his prisoner's holiness and the wonders wrought by him, Hippolytus was convinced of the truth of the Faith and became a Christian. When St Laurence baptized him, he was granted a vision of heaven and said 'I see innocent souls in great joy.' He took Laurence into his own home, and his entire household were baptized, nineteen in all.

When St Laurence was martyred, Hippolytus retrieved his body by night and buried it. He was detected and brought before the Emperor Valerian on the third day after Laurence's death. Despite severe beatings he would not renounce his faith. The Emperor ordered that he be stripped and flayed but, standing naked before the emperor, Hippolytus said 'You have not stripped me, but have begun to clothe me.' Despite all torments, neither Hippolytus nor any of his household would deny Christ. All of his household were slain, one by one, before Hippolytus. Finally Hippolytus himself was bound behind a wild horse and dragged to death.

Our Holy Mother the Empress Irene (Xenia in Monasticism) (12th c.)

She was the pious wife of the Emperor John II Comnenus (reigned 1118-1143), but retired into monastic life. She founded the Monastery of the Pantokrator in Constantinople.

Day 13-Aug-2023 Sunday

Fast Day /oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

The Healing of the Possessed Young Man
1 Corinthians 4:9-16; Matthew 17:14-23
9 I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we are made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and people.
10 We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ.
We are weak, but you are strong.
You have honor, but we have dishonor.
11 Even to this present hour, we hunger and thirst, we are naked, beaten and [we] wander from place to place! 12 We work hard, with our own hands.
When people curse us, we bless [in return].
When we are persecuted, we endure.
13 When we are defamed, we try to conciliate.
We are made as the filth of the world, as the dirt wiped off by all, even until now.
14 I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children.
15 For although you have ten thousand tutors in Christ, yet [you do] not [have] many fathers.
For in Christ Jesus, I became your father through the Good News.
16 I beg you therefore, be imitators of me.

Gospel Reading: The Healing of the Possessed Young Man

14 When they came to the crowd, a man came to Jesus.
He knelt down before him and said: 15 'Lord, have mercy on my son! He is epileptic and suffers terribly as he often falls into the fire and in the water.
16 And so, I brought him to your disciples, but they could not cure him.
17 Jesus answered, 'Faithless and perverse generation! How much longer must I be with you? How long must I bear with you? Bring him to me.
18 When Jesus rebuked it, the demon went out of the boy and he was cured from that hour.
19 Then, the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, 'Why were we not able to cast it out?' 20 He replied, 'Because of your unbelief!e Amen, I tell you that if you have faith [even] like a grain of mustard seed, you will tell this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you! 21But this kind [of spirit] does not go out except by prayer and fasting.

The passion announced again – The payment of the temple tax 22 While they were staying in Galilee, Jesus said to them, 'The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.
23 They will kill him, and the third day, he will be raised up.
They were extremely distressed.

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING
In today's Gospel, we see our Lord just after the Transfiguration on Mt Tabor.
He has been away for some time, together with Peter, James and John, who were present when He transfigured.
During His absence, the rest of His disciples were in a nearby town, where there lived a man whose son was possessed by a demon.
This particular demon had been tormenting the child from a very young age, and had tried to kill him several times by throwing him in fire and water.
The father had asked the disciples to exorcise the demon, but because they were unable to, a great commotion had arisen.
It is precisely at this point that the Gospel passage begins, with Christ appearing along with Peter, James and John.
As soon as the father sees Christ, he runs up to Him and explains to Him not only about the demon, but also about the disciples' inability to cast it out.
Christ asks the father to bring the child to Him, and Christ commands the unclean spirit to come out.
Immediately, the demon leaves and the child is left collapsed on the ground.
Christ takes him by the hand and passes him to his father, who no doubt is left speechless with joy and gratitude towards the Lord.
Later on, when the disciples ask Christ why they were not able to cast out the demon themselves, Christ explains that it was because of their little faith.
Thus, He gives a brief insight on the difficulty involved in casting out demons - a task not to be taken lightly.
This present Gospel, although dealing with an event in time, has to do with all of us.
'What', we might ask, 'does this have to do with me? When does a demon possess me and try to destroy me with fire and water?' The answer is simple: constantly.
All of us, regardless of age, sex, religion etc.
are tormented by demons whose hatred for us is so pure and intense, that they will stop at nothing to destroy our very existence.
Their method for destroying us is fire and water, namely the fire of the passions of lust and anger, which burns us - and the water of despair and depression, which

drowns us.
Because the fire burns us, we naturally seek the opposite: water.
However, the water makes us cold, so we seek its opposite: fire.
Thus, we live out our existence moving between these two extremes.
There is no peace in this state, and certainly no happiness.
Any person who cannot escape this kind of life is doomed to failure and misery.
However, because of our fallen nature, we are not strong enough to break free on our own.
We need to ask for help from the only one who can help us - Christ- and if we are humble enough to ask for His help, our prayers will surely not go unanswered

Day 14-Aug-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Forefeast of the Dormition
† Translation of the Relics of St Theodosius of the Kiev Caves
Holy Prophet Micah (8th c. BC)

Read his prophecies (which include the prophecy that Christ would be born in Bethlehem, Micah 5:2) in the Old Testament book that bears his name. He was a contemporary of the prophets Isaiah, Amos and Hosea, and is ranked sixth among the "minor" prophets. It was he who prophesied that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem. (This is a different Micah from the one mentioned in 1 Chronicles 22:8, who lived earlier). Micah was buried in his home village of Morasth in the land of Judah; his holy relics were found along with those of the prophet Habbakuk during the reign of St Theodosius the Great — their location was given by a revelation to Zebennus, Bishop of Eleutheropolis.

Hieromartyr Marcellus, Bishop of Apamea (389)

He was born to an eminent family in Cyprus, and was well-educated. He was married and had children, but when his wife died he left his family to live as a monk in Syria. There he became known and loved for his learning, humility and kindness to all, and the people of Apamea chose him as their bishop. As bishop, he worked with evangelical fervor to bring the mostly-pagan people to Christ. When a pagan temple was burned down, some pagans blamed Marcellus, seized him, and threw him into the fire, where he perished.

Day 14-Aug-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 2 Corinthians 2:4-15; Matthew 23:13-22
4It was out of much affliction and anguish of heart that I wrote to you with many tears, not to cause you distress but to let you know what overflowing love I have for you.
5Still, if anyone has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to only me but also, to an extent, to all of you.
b 6 For this person, the punishment imposed by the many [of you] should be enough.
7 In fact, you should rather forgive and comfort this person,c for fear that he might be overwhelmed with excessive sorrow.
8 Therefore, I beg you to confirm your love toward him.
9 I had also written with this purpose: that I might know by a test whether you are obedient in all tPaul's ministry 12 Now, when I came to Troas for the Good News of Christ as a door was opened to me in the Lord, 13 I had no relief for my spirit, because I did not find Titus, my brother.
After taking my leave of them [in Troas], I headed into Macedonia.
14 Thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and who reveals through us the sweet fragrance of his knowledge in every place.
15 Indeed, we are a sweet fragrance of Christ to God, both in those who are being saved and in those who are perishing.

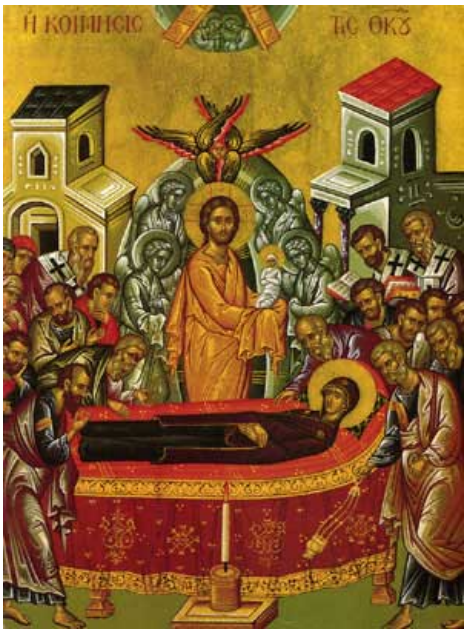
Gospel Reading:
13 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and as a pretense you make long prayers.
Therefore, you will receive a greater condemnation.
14 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you shut the Kingdom of Heaven in the face of people and you yourselves do not enter! And those who would enter, you prevent from doing so.
g 15 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel around by sea and land to make one convert; and when one is converted, you make him twice as much of an heir of Gehennai as yourselves.
16 Woe to you, you blind guides, who say, 'If someone swears by the sanctuary, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the sanctuary is bound.
17 You blind fools! Which is greater, the gold, or the sanctuary that sanctifies the

gold? 18 You say, 'If someone swears by the altar, it is nothing; but if someone swears by the gift that is placed on it, he is bound!' 19 You blind men! Which is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifies the gift? 20 Therefore, whoever swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it.
21Whoever swears by the sanctuary swears by it and by the one dwelling in it.
22 Whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by the one who sits on it.

Day 15-Aug-2023 Tuesday

Dormition of the Mother of God, fast free

The Dormition of Our Most Holy Lady the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary.



Epistle Reading: St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians 2:5-11
Brethren, have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Gospel Reading: Luke 10:38-42, 11:27-28
At that time, Jesus entered a village; and a woman called Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving; and she went to him and said, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve you alone? Tell her then to help me.' But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her.' As he said this, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, 'Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked!' But he said, 'Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!'

> On the Cross, the Lord charged the Apostle John to care for His holy Mother. The Apostle settled her in a house in Jerusalem, where she lived for the rest of her days on earth, praying and offering counsel and encouragement to the Apostles. In her old age, the Archangel Gabriel appeared to her and told her that in three days' time she would enter into her rest. Giving thanks to God,

she hastened to the Mount of Olives where she prayed continually, preparing herself to meet the Lord. Meanwhile, the Apostles, scattered in various parts of the earth, were caught up in clouds and miraculously brought by the holy Angels to Jerusalem, so that they might all be with the Theotokos at her repose. After she had blessed them, she gave up her soul to God. The Apostles buried her with all honor, solemnity and joy at Gethsemane. The Apostle Thomas, who was delayed (again!) by God's providence, arrived on the third day and went to her tomb, intending to honor her. But when the Apostles opened her grave, they found her holy body gone and only the winding-sheet remaining. That evening the Theotokos appeared to them surrounded by angels, and said to them, 'Rejoice: I will be with you always!'. Thus they learned that she had been bodily translated to heaven, anticipating the general resurrection of all. Her age at her repose is not known, but many say that she was about sixty years old.

Thus spoke the Lord Most-high:
'From thy heart, pure Virgin,
Living water will flow,
That those who thirst will drink Christ.'
Life-bearing source,
We all boast of thee! Those who thirst will drink Christ.
By Him, the bitter is sweetened;
By Him, the scales are washed from blind eyes;
And by Him, the grief of those in sorrow is healed.
Life-bearing source,
We all boast of thee! Sweet drink sprung from eternity,
The brook filling our arid age:
Once more raised toward heaven,
Our exhausted world becomes refreshed.
Life-bearing source,
We all boast of thee! Glory to thee, O Most-pure One!
Glory to thee, O Mother of God!
Thou didst bear for us the Living Christ,
The living water of grace!
Life-bearing source,
We all boast of thee! By Saint Nikolai Velimirovic Apolytikion of Dormition of the Theotokos
First Tone
In birth, you preserved your virginity; in death, you did not abandon the world, O Theotokos. As mother of life, you departed to the source of life, delivering our souls from death by your intercessions.

Kontakion of Dormition of the Theotokos

Second Tone
Neither the grave nor death could contain the Theotokos, the unshakable hope, ever vigilant in intercession and protection. As Mother of life, He who dwelt in the ever-virginal womb transposed her to life.

Day 15-Aug-2023 Tuesday

Dormition of the Mother of God, fast free

Readings of the day: 2 Corinthians 2:14-3:3; Matthew 23:23-28

14 Thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and who reveals
through us the sweet fragrance of his knowledge in every place.
15 Indeed, we are a sweet fragrance of Christ to God, both in those who are being
saved and in those who are perishing.
16 To the latter, we are a stench from death to death, but to the first [we are] a
sweet fragrance from life to life.
Who is equal to such a task? 17 We are not as many who 'peddle the word of
God,' but we speak in Christ with sincerity, as from God and in the sight of God.
3 Are we again trying to obtain your approval? Or do we need (as some do) letters
of recommendation to you or from you? 2You are our letter, written in our hearts,
known and read by all! 3 It is being revealed that you are a letter of Christ, served
by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, and not in tablets of
stone but in tablets that are hearts of flesh.

Gospel Reading:

23 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and
cumin, but you have not fulfilled the truly significant matters of the law: justice,
mercy, and faith.
It is these you should have practiced, without neglecting the others.
24 You are blind guides who filter out a fly and yet swallow a camel! 25 Woe to
you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and
the platter, but inside, they are full of greed and unrighteousness.
26 You blind Pharisees, first clean the inside of the cup and platter, so that the
outside may also become clean.
27 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed
tombs which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside, they are full of dead
bones and all [kinds of] impurity.
28 Likewise, you also appear righteous to men in appearance, but inside, you are
full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

Day 16-Aug-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Translation of the Image Not-Made-By-Hands of our Lord Jesus Christ from Edessa to Constantinople (944)

The Third "Feast of the Savior" in August
While the Lord was preaching in Palestine, his fame reached a king Avgar of Edessa, who suffered from leprosy. Avgar sent a messenger named Ananias to ask whether the Lord could heal his illness. The king also charged Ananias, if he was unable to bring back Jesus Himself, to bring back a likeness of Him. When Ananias found Jesus, the Lord told him that he could not come to Edessa since the time of His passion was at hand. But he took a cloth and washed His face, miraculously leaving a perfect image of His face on the cloth. Ananias brought the holy image back to the king, who reverently kissed it. Immediately his leprosy was healed, save for a small lesion that remained on his forehead. Later the Apostle Thaddeus came to Edessa, preaching the gospel, and Avgar and his household were baptized, at which time his remaining leprosy vanished. The king had the holy likeness mounted on wood and displayed above the city gate for all to revere. But Avgar's grandson returned to idolatry, and the Bishop of Edessa had the image hidden in the city wall to prevent it from being defiled. Many years later, when the Persian king Chosroes besieged Edessa, the Bishop Eulabius was told in a vision to find the sealed chamber, whose location had been forgotten. The holy icon was found, completely incorrupt, and by its power the Persian army was driven off. In the year 944 the image was brought to Constantinople and enshrined in the Church of the Theotokos called the Pharos. This is the event commemorated today.

Martyr Diomedes the Physician of Tarsus in Cilicia (298)

He is one of the Holy Unmercenary Physicians, a physician who practiced in Tarsus during the reign of Diocletian. Around 288 he came to Nicaea, where he healed many bodies by his medical arts and many souls through his preaching of the Gospel of Christ. The Emperor Diocletian sent men to arrest him, but when they arrived they found that he had already reposed. They cut

off his head to take it back to the Emperor, and for this abomination were all struck blind. When Diocletian saw St Diomedes' head, he ordered the men to return it to the body from which they had taken it. As soon as they had done so, their sight was restored.

Day 16-Aug-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 2 Corinthians 3:4-11; Matthew 23:29-39
4 We have such confidence through Christ toward God;
5 not that we are competent on our own to claim anything for ourselves; but our competence is from God
6 who has made us competent as servants of a new covenant; not of the letter, but of the Spirit.
Indeed, the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life!
7 However, if the ministry of death, written in stones, came with glory, so much that the children of Israel could not gaze at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face (and this glory was passing away):
8 will not the ministry of the Spirit be with much more glory?
9 For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds all the more in glory!
10 It is certain that what used to be glorious has not been made glorious in such a manner, that is by such an overwhelming glory.
11 For if what passes away was glorious, how much more glorious is that which remains!

Gospel Reading:
29 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the tombs of the righteous,
30 saying, 'If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have partaken with them in the blood of the prophets.
31 Therefore, you testify to yourselves that you are children of those who killed the prophets!
32 Fill up, then, the measure [of sin] of your forefathers.
33 You serpents, offspring of vipers, how will you escape the judgment of Gehennae?
34 Therefore, behold, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes.
Some of them, you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from city to city.
35 Thus all the righteous blood shed on the earth will come upon you, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zachariah son of Barachiah whom you killed between the sanctuary and the altar.

36 Amen, I tell you: all these things will come upon this generation.
37 Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often have I desired to gather your children, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings; but you were not willing!
38 Behold, your house is left to you in a desolate state.
39 For I tell you, you will not see me from now on until [the day when] you are saying, 'Blessed is he who comes in the Name of the Lord!'

Day 17-Aug-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Martyr Myron of Cyzicus (250)

He was a priest in Achaia. In the time of the Emperor Decius, when Antipater was governor of Achaia, the persecutors entered the church on the Feast of the Nativity, dragged Myron away from the service and put him to torture. He endured many horrible tortures, but would not worship the idols. Finally he was thrown to wild beasts. When Antipater saw the beasts greeting Myron affectionately, the persecutor seized a sword and slew himself. The Saint was then sent to Cyzicus, where he was beheaded by the proconsul.

Holy Martyr Patroclus (late 3rd c.)

He was born to wealthy parents in Trychasia (now Troyes) in Gaul. Despite his high station he used his wealth to give daily alms to the poor and ate only once a day after sunset. Such was his holiness that he became a wonderworker, known widely for his healing power. When the Emperor Aurelian visited Gaul, he ordered Patroclus brought before him. The Saint freely confessed Christ and told the Emperor: 'If, O King, you desire some of my goods, I will give them to you, for I can see your wretchedness.' The astonished Emperor asked how he could call the ruler of the entire Empire wretched. Patroclus replied, 'You have earthly, transitory riches, but you are wretched, for you do not possess yourself, since you have no faith in Christ in your heart.' The saint was condemned to death and beheaded. Two beggars, to whom he had given alms, found his body and gave it honorable burial.

Day 17-Aug-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: 2 Corinthians 4:1-6; Matthew 24:13-28

4 A difficult ministry Therefore, seeing that we have this ministry, even as we have
obtained mercy, we do not waver.
2 We have renounced the hidden things of shame: we no longer walk in clever lies
and we do not handle the word of God deceitfully.
Instead, by the manifestation of the truth, we seek the approval of everyone who
has a conscience in the sight of God.
3 Even if our Good News is veiled, it is veiled in those who perish, 4as the god of
this world has blinded the minds of those who do not believe, so that the light of
the Good News of the glory of Christ who is the image of God should not dawn on
them.
5 For we do not preach [about] ourselves, but [about] Christ Jesus as Lord, and
[we present] ourselves as your servants for the sake of Jesus, 6 seeing that it is
God who said, 'Light will shine out of darkness, and he has shone in our hearts to
give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the faced of Jesus Christ.

Gospel Reading:

13 But the one who endures to the end will be saved.
14 This Good News of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a
witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.
15 Therefore, when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken
about by the prophet Daniel standing in the holy place (let the reader understand),
16 let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.
17 The one who is on the housetop should not [even] go down to carry out the
things that are in the house.
18 The one who is in the field should not [even] return to get his clothes.
19 But woe to those who are with child and to nursing mothers in those days! 20
Pray that your flight will not be in the winter or a Sabbath day.
21 For then, there will be great oppression, such as has not been from the
beginning of the world until now, and such as will never be again.
22 Unless those days were cut short, no flesh would be saved.
But for the sake of the elect,a those days will be shortened.
23 Then, if any one tells you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or, 'There,' do not believe
it! 24 False messiahs and false prophets will arise, and they will show great signs
and wonders in order to lead many astray, and if possible, even the elect.

25 Behold, I have told you this in advance.
26 If therefore people tell you, 'Behold, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out; or 'Behold, he is in the inner rooms,' do not believe it! 27 For as the lightning flashes from the east and is seen even to the west, this is how the coming of the Son of Man will be.
The sign of the Son of Man – The glorious coming 28 For wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together.

Day 18-Aug-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

John and George, Patriarchs of Constantinople

Martyrs Florus and Laurus of Illyria (2nd c.)

"Brothers in both the flesh and the spirit, they were both zealous Christians, and stonemasons by craft. They lived in Illyria. Some pagan prince set them to build a pagan temple. It happened during the course of their work that a fragment of stone splintered off and flew into the eye of the pagan priest's son, who was watching the building work with curiosity. Seeing his son blinded and bleeding, the priest shouted at Florus and Laurus and tried to thrash them. Then the holy brothers told him that, if he would believe in the God in whom they believed, his son would be restored to health. The priest promised. Florus and Laurus prayed to the one, living Lord with tears and made the sign of the Cross over the child's stricken eye. The child was healed instantly and his eye became whole as it had been before. Then the priest, Merentius, and his son were baptised, and they both very soon suffered for Christ in the flames. But Florus and Laurus, when they had finished the temple, put a Cross on it, called together all the Christians, and consecrated it in the name of the Lord Jesus with an all-night vigil of hymns. Hearing of this, the governor of Illyria burned many of these Christians by fire and had Florus and Laurus thrown alive into a well, which was then filled with earth. Their relics were later discovered and taken to Constantinople. These two wonderful brothers suffered for Christ, and were glorified by Him, in the second century." (Prologue)

Our Holy Father John, Abbot of Rila (946)

He was born near Sophia in Bulgaria during the reign of the Emperor Boris. When his parents died he withdrew from the world to a cave high in the mountains, where he gave himself to the ascetical struggle. There the Prologue says that he 'endured many assaults both by demons and men, from robbers and from his kinsmen.' In time he moved to the mountain of Rila,

where he lived in a hollow tree, eating only the wild herbs and fruits there. On Rila he saw no human being for many years, but was eventually discovered by a shepherd, after which his fame spread quickly: many came to him for counsel and for the healing of diseases, and Peter, King of Bulgaria, visited him for advice. Many people seeking their salvation settled near him, and soon a church and monastery developed around him. St John reposed in 946 and appeared to his disciples after his death. His relics are venerated at the monastery of Rila, which has for centuries been a lighthouse of Orthodox spirituality in Bulgaria.

Day 18-Aug-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 2 Corinthians 4:13-18; Matthew 24:27-33, 42-51
13 Still, we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, 'I believed,
and therefore I spoke.
f We believe, and therefore we also speak; 14 knowing that he who raised the Lord
Jesus will also raise us with Jesus, and bring us with you into his presence.
15 All these things are for your benefit, so that as grace is extended to many, this
may also cause thanksgiving to be multiplied to the glory of God.
16 Therefore, we do not lose heart, but even if outwardly we are decaying, yet our
inner self is being renewed day by day.
17 Indeed, the result is that our light affliction (which is temporary) is producing for
us an ever-increasing standing in eternal glory! 18 This is because we do not look
at visible things but at invisible things, and the things which are seen are temporal,
but the things which are not seen are eternal.
Gospel reading:

27 For as the lightning flashes from the east and is seen even to the west, this is
how the coming of the Son of Man will be.
28 For wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together.
29 But immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened, the
moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from the sky, the powers of the
heavens will be shaken; 30 and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the
sky.
All the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on
the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.
31 He will send out his angels with a great sound of a trumpet and they will gather
his elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.
32 Now, learn this parable from the fig tree.
When its branch has become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that the
summer is near.
33 Likewise, when you see all these things, know that the time is near, even at the
doors.
42 Therefore, watch, because you do not know in what hour your Lord is coming.
43 However, know this, that if the master of the house had known in what watch of
the night the thief was coming, he would have watched and not allowed his house
to be broken into.
44 Therefore, be ready, for it is at an hour which you do not expect that the Son of

Man will come.
45 Who then is the faithful and wise servant whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food in due season?
46 Blessed is that servant whom his lord finds doing so when he comes. 47 Amen, I tell you that he will set him over all that he has. 48 But if that evil servant should say in his heart, ‘My lord is delaying his return,’
49 and if he should begin to beat his fellow-servants and eat and drink with the drunkards, 50 the lord of that servant will come in a day when he does not expect it and in an hour when he does not know,
51 and he will cut him into pieces and appoint his portion with the hypocrites. And there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Day 19-Aug-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Martyr Andrew Strateletes and 2,593 soldiers with him in Cilicia (~289)

"He was an officer, a tribune, in the Roman army in the time of the Emperor Maximian. A Syrian by birth, he served in his native land. When the Persians attacked the imperial Roman army, this Andrew was entrusted with the command in the battle against the enemy — whence his title: commander, strateletes. A secret Christian, although as yet unbaptised, Andrew commended himself to the living God, and, taking only the cream of the army, went to war. Before the battle, he told his soldiers that, if they all called upon the aid of the one, true God, Christ the Lord, their enemies would become as dust scattered before them. All the soldiers, fired with enthusiasm by Andrew and his faith, invoked Christ's aid and attacked. The Persian army was utterly routed. When the victorious Andrew returned to Antioch, some jealous men denounced him as a Christian and the imperial governor summoned him for trial. Andrew openly proclaimed his steadfast faith in Christ. After harsh torture, the governor threw Andrew into prison and wrote to the Emperor in Rome. Knowing Andrew's popularity among the people and in the army, the Emperor ordered the governor to set Andrew free, but to seek another occasion and another excuse (not his faith) to kill him. By God's revelation, Andrew came to know of this imperial command, and, taking his faithful soldiers (2,593 in all) with him, went off to Tarsus in Cilicia, where they were all baptised by the bishop, Peter. Persecuted here also by imperial might, Andrew and his companions withdrew deep into the Armenian mountain of Tavros. There in a ravine, while they were at prayer, the Roman army came upon them and beheaded them all. Not one of them would recant, all being determined on death by martyrdom for Christ. On the spot where a stream of the martyrs' blood flowed down, a spring of healing water sprang forth, healing from every disease. The bishop, Peter, came secretly with his people and buried the martyrs' bodies in that same place. They all suffered with honour at the end of the third century and were crowned with wreaths of eternal glory, entering into the Kingdom of Christ our God." (Prologue)

Apolytikion

Thy Martyrs, O Lord, in their courageous contest for Thee received as the prize the crowns of incorruption and life from Thee, our immortal God. For since they possessed Thy strength, they cast down the tyrants and wholly destroyed the demons' strengthless presumption. O Christ God, by their prayers, save our souls, since Thou art merciful.

Venerable Theophanes
Holy Martyrs Timothy, Agapius and Thekla

Day 19-Aug-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Matthew 19:3-12

3Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
4I always give thanks to my God concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you in Christ Jesus; 5that in everything you have been enriched in him, in all [manner of] speech and knowledge; 6 even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you.
7 And so, you lack no gift as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ; 8 who will also confirm you until the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.
9 God is faithful, through whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Gospel Reading:

3 Pharisees came to him to test him, asking, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason?' 4Jesus answered, 'Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, 5and said, 'For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be attached to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh?'c 6 And so, they are no longer two, but one flesh! Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one tear apart.
7 They asked him, 'Why then did Moses command us to give our wife a bill of divorce and send her away?' 8 Jesus replied, 'Because of the hardness of your hearts, Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it has not been so.
9 I tell you that whoever divorces his wife (except for reason of sexual immorality) and marries another commits adultery;f and he who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.
10 His disciples said to him, 'If this is the situation of the man with his wife, it is not advantageous to marry!' 11 But Jesus said to them, 'Not all men can receive this saying: only those to whom it is given.
12 Certainly, there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb, there are also eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven.
He who is able to receive this saying, let him receive it.

Day 20-Aug-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Holy Prophet Samuel (11th c. BC)

He was the last of the Judges of Israel, and was appointed by God to anoint the first two kings of Israel, Saul and David. Read the Old Testament book 1 Samuel for his story. Many believe that he is the author of the books of Judges, Ruth and the first 24 chapters of I Samuel.

Hieromartyr Philip, Bishop of Heraklion, and those with him (2nd c.)

He served in Thrace in the time of Diocletian's persecutions. When the pagans were about to burn a Christian church, he came forward and said to them: 'Do you think that God is shut within walls? He lives in men's hearts.' The church was burned and all its clergy were taken to Jedrene where, after long imprisonment and torture, they were drowned in the river Maritsa. The holy bishop Philip, his priest Severus, his deacon Hermes, and thirty-eight other Christians all received the martyr's crown.

Day 20-Aug-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

The Parable of the Unmerciful Debtor
1 Corinthians 9:2-12; Matthew 18:23-35
2 If to others, I am not an apostle, yet at least for you I am one! You are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.
3 My defense to those who question me is this: 4Have we no right to eat and to drink? 5 Do we not have the right to take along a sister – a wifea- even as the rest of the apostles, and the brothersb of the Lord, and Kephas? 6 Or is it only Barnabas and I who are obliged to work? 7 What soldier ever serves at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who feeds a flock and does not drink from the flock's milk? 8 Do I speak these things according to human ways? Does not the law say the same thing as well? 9 For it is written in the law of Moses, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.
c Is it for the oxen that God shows cares, 10 or does he say these things for our benefit? Yes, it was written for us, because whoever plows and whoever threshes should do so with the hope to have their share {of a harvest}.
11 If we sowed to you spiritual things, is it [such] a great thing if we reap your material things? 12 If others partake of this right over you, should we not even more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we bear all things, so that we may cause no hindrance to the Good News of Christ.

Gospel Reading: The Parable of the Unmerciful Debtor

23 Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a king who wanted to settle his accounts with his servants.
24 When he began the settlement, someone was brought in who owed him ten thousand talents.
b 25 But because the servant could not pay, his lord gave orders that he be sold, with his wife, children, and all that he had, so that payment may be made.
26 At this, the servant fell down on his knees before him, saying: 'Lord, have patience with me, and I will repay you

all!' 27 The lord of that servant, moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.
28 However, that servant went out and found one of his fellow-servants who owed him one hundred denarii.
He grabbed him and took him by the throat, saying: 'Pay me what you owe!' 29 And so, his fellow-servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying: 'Have patience with me, and I will repay you!' 30 But the first man would not [have compassion] but went off and had him cast into prison, until he should pay back what was due.
31 When his [other] fellow-servants saw what had been done, they were extremely distressed and came to their lord to report all that had taken place.
32 Then, his lord summoned the [first] servant and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me.
33 Should not you also have had mercy on your fellow-servant, even as I had mercy on you?' 34 His lord was angry and delivered him to the jailers until he would pay all that was due.
35 This is how my heavenly Father will also treat you if you do not each forgive each other from your hearts.

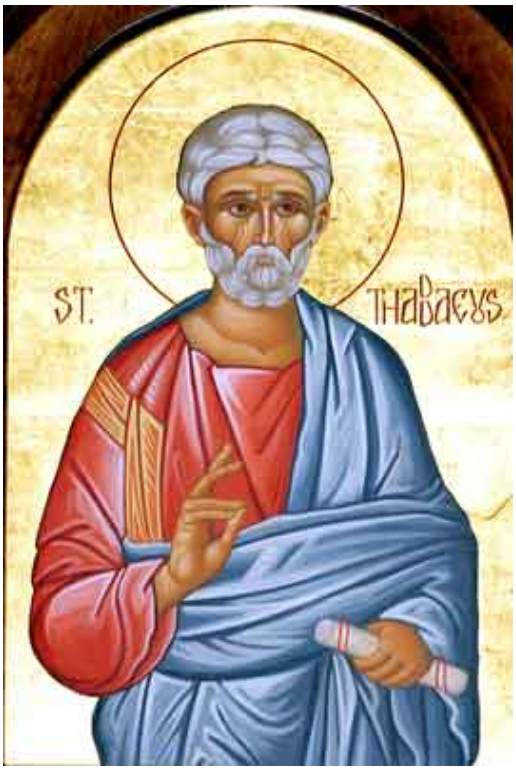
SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING
There are many parables in the gospels but only a relatively small number are set by the Fathers to be read as the Gospel for Sunday.
This means that when one is set we should take trouble to understand what the Lord is saying to us.
The parable today has always been understood as an allegory.
It is a story that tells us a truth and that truth concerns true forgiveness.
So, by the king in the parable we are to understand God.
He decides 'to settle accounts", meaning some form of judgement.
He identifies one of his servants who owes him a very great deal of money – ten thousand talents is an enormous sum.
As the servant cannot pay he, along with all his family, will be sold into slavery in order to redeem part of the debt.
The point here underlines just how serious the debt is, affecting not only the servant, but also his wife and children.
The servant begged for mercy and we are told that the king was 'moved to compassion, released him and forgave him the debt".
So, although the servant offered to pay, he was entirely forgiven the debt.
And here we are to understand the great debt we have to God, the vast amount of things that we owe him yet do little or nothing to redeem our debts.
Yet God has compassion for us and forgives us all the debt.
But this forgiveness requires something from us.
The servant goes out and finds his fellow servant who owes him a small debt and treats him badly.

He attempts to extort the money from him by throwing him into prison.
He did not have compassion for his fellow servant and did not follow the example of his master, the king, at all.
However, other servants tell the king what has happened.
The Church Fathers here suggest that these servants are the angels who are always watching us and are alert to what we are doing.
The king reacts angrily and hands the wicked servant over to 'the torturers" until he pays all that he owes.
And here the Church Fathers identify the torturers with the demons in hell who will give us what we deserve if we have lost 'the mind of Christ" and fallen away from His commandments.
However, the reality is that when we have been wronged by someone else, and it may be a very bad wrong, it is in fact difficult to forgive them.
It is easy to say 'I forgive you".
It is a very different matter to actually mean what we say.
The parable then gives us two guides as to how we go about forgiving.
The first is that we must have self-knowledge.
We must actually accept that we are not perfect.
We have wronged others and we are in as much need of forgiveness as everyone else.
The second thing is that we must learn to have compassion.
The king had compassion, the wicked servant did not.
We must pray that our hearts are softened so that we too may learn and exercise the compassion that is shown to us by God.
 'Some think that the
Old Testament is stricter than the New, but they judge wrongly; they are fooling themselves.
The old law did not punish the desire to hold onto wealth; it punished theft.
But now the rich man is not condemned for taking the property of others; rather, he is condemned for not giving his own property away".
(St Gregory the Great)

Day 21-Aug-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Apostle Thaddeus of the Seventy (44)



He was by birth a Jew from Edessa; it was he who instructed king Avgar in the Faith and baptised him (see August 16). According to Eusebius he is not the Thaddeus who was one of the Twelve (Mt 10:3), but was one of the Seventy. After Christ's Resurrection, he preached the Gospel in Mesopotamia and ended his life in martyrdom.

Holy Martyrs Bassa and her sons Theognis, Agapios, and Pistis (4th c.)

"Bassa was the wife of a pagan priest, but she was secretly a Christian and brought her sons up in a Christian spirit. Her husband hated her for her faith, and handed her over to the judge for torture, together with her sons. After harsh torture, her sons were beheaded (it is thought, in Edessa in Macedonia). Bassa was filled with joy to see her sons thus gloriously finish their martyr's course for Christ, and herself went with yet greater desire from torture to torture. When she was thrown into the sea, angels appeared to her and took her to an island in the Sea of Marmara, where she was slain with the sword under Maximian. Thus

holy Bassa was in a twofold manner made worthy of the Kingdom of Christ: as a martyr and as the mother of martyrs." (Prologue)

Holy Forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

They are also commemorated on the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers, before Nativity.

Day 21-Aug-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 2 Corinthians 5:10-15; Mark 1:9-15
10 For we must all be revealed before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive according to what was done in the body; good or evil.
A new creation- The ministry of reconciliation 11 But since we know the fear of the Lord, let us try to persuade others.
What we are is revealed to God, and I hope that we are also revealed to your consciences.
12 Certainly, we are not trying to obtain your approval once again, but we say this to give you an occasion to be proud of us, so that you may have something to answer to those who boast in appearances- not in the heart [of things].
13 If we are unreasonable, it is for God, and if we are reasonable, it is for you.
14 Indeed, the love of Christ overwhelms us, because we consider this: that one died for all, therefore all have died.
15 He died for all, so that those who live should no longer live to themselves but to him who died and rose again for them.

Gospel Reading:
9 It happened, in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and he was baptized by John in the Jordan.
10 Immediately coming up from the water, he saw the heavens torn openh and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.
11 A voice came out of the heavens, 'You are my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.
12 At once, the Spirit drove him out into the desert.
13 He was there, in the desert for forty days, being tempted by Satan.
He was with the wild animals and the angels were ministering to him.
b 14 Now, after John had been arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Good News of the Kingdom of God, 15 and saying, 'The time is fulfilled! The Kingdom of God is at hand! Repent and believe in the Good News.

Day 22-Aug-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Holy Martyr Anthusa and others with her
Martyr Agathonicus of Nicomedia and his companions (4th c.)

He lived in Nicomedia, where he turned many pagans from their idolatry to faith in Christ. For this he and several companions were seized, beaten, bound, and taken to Byzantium. On the way, several of Agathonicus' companions died from their harsh treatment. The survivors, including Agathonicus himself, were taken to Selyvria in Thrace, where they were tortured before the Emperor himself, then beheaded.

Holy Martyr Eulalia of Barcelona (303)

She was born of Christian parents in Barcelona, and dedicated herself to a life of holiness, taking Christ as her bridegroom. When the persecutor Dacian came to Barcelona, Eulalia secretly left her parents' house by night and came before Dacian, denouncing him in front of many witnesses as a murderer of the innocent, and publicly confessing her faith in Christ. The wicked Dacian had her stripped and beaten, then tied to a tree in the form of a cross, and ordered that her flesh be burned with torches. When her torturer mockingly asked 'Where is your Christ to save you?' she answered 'He is here with me; you cannot see Him because of your impurity.' When the holy Eulalia died at last under torture, the people saw a white dove fly from her mouth. An unseasonable snowstorm then covered her naked body like a white garment.

Day 22-Aug-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: 2 Corinthians 5:15-21; Mark 1:16-22

15 He died for all, so that those who live should no longer live to themselves but to him who died and rose again for them.
16 Therefore, we do not think of anyone according to the flesh any more.
Even though we used to think of Christ according to the flesh, we no longer think of him this way.
17 Therefore, anyone who is in Christ is a new creation! The old things have passed away.
Behold, all things have become new! 18 But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ and who gave to us the ministry of reconciliation.
19 What I mean is that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not imputing sins, but having entrusted us with the word of reconciliation.
20 Therefore, we are ambassadors of Christ: it is as if God was making [his] supplication through us: we beg you, on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God!
21God made him who knew no sin to become sin for our sake; so that in him, we might become the righteousness of God.

Gospel Reading:

16 Passing along by the sea of Galilee, Jesus saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen.
17 Jesus said to them, 'Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.
18 Immediately, they left their nets and followed him.
19 Going on a little further from there, he saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were also in a boat, mending the nets.
20 At once, he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and they began to follow him.
21They went into Capernaum, and on the Sabbath day, Jesus entered into the synagogue and taught.
22 The people were astonished at his teaching because he taught them as having authority, not like the scribes.

Day 23-Aug-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Leavetaking of Dormition

On the Holy Mountain, the Feast of the Dormition is extended to August 28, thus consecrating almost the entire month of August to the Most Holy Theotokos.

Hieromartyr Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons (202)

He was born in Asia Minor around the year 120, and was a disciple of Saint Polycarp, who was in turn a disciple of St John the Evangelist. He succeeded the martyred St Pothinus as Bishop of Lyons in Gaul (now France). He produced many writings contesting not only against paganism but against Gnostic heresies that were then troubling the Church. When Victor, Bishop of Rome, planned to excommunicate the Christians of Asia Minor for celebrating Pascha on a different date than the Church of Rome, Irenaeus persuaded him to stay his hand and maintain unity and peace in the Church. (This was before the date of Pascha had been set by the Ecumenical Councils). By his efforts Lyons became for centuries a center and bastion of Orthodoxy in the West.

Martyr Lupus (306), slave of St Demetrios of Thessalonica

He was the servant of the Great Martyr Demetrius, and was present at his martyrdom. He dipped the hem of his garment in the martyr's blood, and later worked many miracles with the garment, healing many illnesses. At the order of the Emperor Maximian, he was then himself arrested, tortured and, like his earthly master, beheaded for Christ. It is said that, as his death approached, he prayed to be baptized before his death, for, though a believer in Christ, he had never been able to be baptized. A cloud suddenly poured down a torrent of water upon him, answering his prayer.

Hieromartyr Pothinos, Bishop of Lyons (177)

The Holy Polycarp (February 23) sent Pothinus from Asia Minor to spread the Gospel in Gaul. He brought many there to faith in Christ, and became the first

bishop of Lyons. During a persecution of Christians Pothinus, who was then ninety years old, was brought before the proconsul, who asked him 'Who is the Christian God?' Pothinus answered 'You will find out, if you are worthy.' He was beaten fiercely with staves and stones, then thrown in prison, where he died of his injuries.

Day 23-Aug-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 2 Corinthians 6:11-16; Mark 1:23-28
11 We have spoken freely to you, O Corinthians, and our heart is open wide.
12 We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us!
13 In return, I speak to you as to my children: be open [to what we have to say].
14 Do not be mismatched with unbelievers: what association is there between righteousness and wickedness? Or what fellowship is there between light and darkness?
15 What agreement does Christ have with Belial? What sharing is there between a believer and an unbeliever? 16 What agreement can there be between God's sanctuary and idols? For you are a sanctuary of the living God.
Even as God said, 'I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they will be my people.

Gospel Reading:
23 Just then, there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit who cried out,
24 'Away! What do we have to do with you, Jesus, you Nazarene? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are: the Holy One of God!'
25 Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be quiet, and come out of him!' 26 The unclean spirit, convulsing the man and crying with a loud voice, came out of him.
27 The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, 'What is this? A new teaching? For with authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him!'
28 The news about him went out immediately everywhere into the entire region of Galilee and its surrounding area.

Day 24-Aug-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Translation of the Relics of Saint Dionysios of Zakynthos, Bishop of Aegina

Hieromartyr Eutyches (1st c.)

He was a disciple and friend of St John the Theologian, and worked with the Apostle Paul, and is himself named as an Apostle though he is not one of the Seventy. He travelled widely in the ministry of the Gospel of Christ, suffering many imprisonments and tortures. He died in Sebastia, the place of his birth. The Prologue says that he was beheaded, the Great Horologion that he reposed in peace "in deep old age."

New Hieromartyr Kosmas of Aitolia, Equal-to-the-Apostles (1779)

This recent Equal to the Apostles was born in Mega Dendron (Great Tree) in Aetolia. He became a monk on Mt Athos, where he lived and prayed for many years. But he was troubled by the ignorance of the Gospel that had fallen on many of the Orthodox people, living under the oppression of the Ottoman Turks. He went to Constantinople, where he studied the rhetorical arts and received the blessing of Patriarch Seraphim II to preach the Gospel. He travelled throughout Greece, Macedonia, Serbia and Albania, preaching at every town he visited. Often not only Greeks but many Muslims would come to hear him, so great was his reputation for holiness. Though he always sought the blessing of the local bishop and the local Turkish governor before he preached in an area, his strong condemnations of dishonest business practices aroused the enmity of Orthodox Christian and Jewish merchants, who falsely accused him to the authorities. He was strangled by the Turks and thrown into a river in Albania, but his wonderworking relics were preserved. He reposed at the age of sixty-five.

† Translation of the relics of St Peter, metropolitan of Kiev (1479)

See December 21 for his life.

Day 24-Aug-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: 2 Corinthians 7:1-10; Mark 1:29-35

7 Since we have these promises, beloved, let us purify ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, so that we may bring [our] holiness to completion in the fear of God.

2Open your hearts to us! We wronged no one, we corrupted no one, and we took advantage of no one.

3I say this not to condemn you, for as I have said before, you are in our hearts to die together and to live together.

4 [But] great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my boasting on your behalf! I am filled with consolation, I overflow with joy in all our afflictions.

Paul's joy concerning the Corinthians 5Indeed, even after arriving in Macedonia, our flesh had no relief; we were afflicted on every side.

There was struggle on the outside and fear inside.

6 Nevertheless, he who comforts the lowly, God, comforted us with the arrival of Titus;

7 and not just by his arrival but also by the encouragement he had received from you.

He told us of your longing, your mourning, and your zeal for me; and I rejoiced even more.

8 Although I [know that I] made you feel bad with my [first] letter, I do not regret it (though I did regret it for a while).

I can see that my letter made you sorry, a least for a while.

9 But now, I rejoice, not that you experienced distress, but that you were made sorry to repentance.

Indeed, you experienced godly distress and thus you did not experience a loss because of us.

10 Indeed, godly sorrow works repentance that leads to salvation, it does not bring regret.

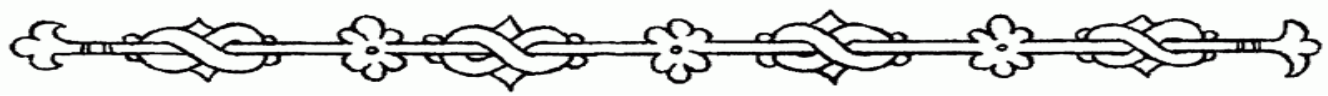
On the other hand, the sorrow of the world is deadly.

Gospel Reading:

29 As soon as they left the synagogue, they came into the house of Simon and Andrew, [along] with James and John.

30 Now, Simon's mother-in-law lay sick with a fever, and immediately, they told him about her.

31 Jesus came, took her by the hand, and raised her up.
The fever left her and she began to serve them.
32 At evening, when the sun had set, they brought him all who were sick or possessed by demons.
33 The entire city was gathered at the door.
34 He healed many who were afflicted with various diseases and cast out many demons.
However, he did not allow the demons to speak because they knew him.
35 Early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus arose, left the house, went out into a deserted place and prayed there.



Day 25-Aug-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Apostle Titus of the Seventy

Titus was one of the Seventy. He was born in Crete and was educated in Greek philosophy and poetry. Following a vision in a dream, he began reading the Prophet Isaiah and lost his faith in Hellenic philosophy. Hearing of Christ the Lord, Titus traveled to Jerusalem with other Cretans, and there he heard the Savior speak and witnessed His mighty acts. He gave his young heart completely to Christ. Later he was baptized by the Apostle Paul, whom he served, like a son to a father, in the work of evangelization. Paul loved Titus so much that he referred to him at times as his son (cf. Titus 1:4) and at times as his brother (cf. II Corinthian 12:18). Titus traveled extensively with the great apostle, and Paul appointed him Bishop of Crete. Titus was present at Paul's suffering and death in Rome, and honorably buried the body of his teacher and spiritual father. Afterward Titus returned to Crete, where with great success he baptized the pagans, and where he prudently governed the Church of God until old age. Titus entered into rest at the age of ninety-four.

Source: St. Nikolai Velimirovic, The Prologue of Ohrid – Volume Two.

<u>Kontakion</u>

O yoke-mate of Paul, together with him, thou didst preach the tidings to us of saving grace bestowed of God, O Apostle Titus, blest and elect revealer of mysteries; for which cause we cry out to thee: Cease not to entreat Christ God for all of us.

Return of the relics of the Apostle Bartholomew from Anastasiopolis to Lipari (6th c.)

The Apostle's main commemoration is on June 11.

Day 25-Aug-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 2 Corinthians 7:10-16; Mark 2:18-22
10 Indeed, godly sorrow works repentance that leads to salvation, it does not bring regret.
On the other hand, the sorrow of the world is deadly.
11 Consider what happened in this case: you experienced distress in a godly way and what serious reaction it worked in you! Yes, what apology, anger, fear, longing, zeal, and vengeance [resulted]! In everything you have shown yourselves blameless in this matter.
12 And so, although I wrote to you, it was neither for the sake of the offender nor for the one offended, but so that your devotion to us might be revealed in the sight of God.
13 Therefore, we have been comforted.
In our comfort, we rejoiced all the more on account of Titus's joy, because you had refreshed his spirit.
14 I had boasted to him about you, and I was not disappointed! And just as we spoke all things to you in truth, likewise boasting to Titus [about you] was found to be the truth.
15 His deep affection for you is even stronger as he remembers your obedience, how with fear and trembling you received him.
16 I rejoice that concerning you, I can be confident in everything.
Gospel reading:

18 John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting, and they came to ask him, 'Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not?' 19 Jesus told them, 'Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast! 20 But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then, they will fast in that day.
21 No one sews a piece of new cloth on an old garment, or else the patch shrinks and tears away from the old, and a worse hole is made.
22 No one puts new wine into old wineskins, or else the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will pour out and the skins will be destroyed! Instead, new wine is put into fresh wineskins.

Day 26-Aug-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Our Righteous Father Joseph
Martyrs Adrian and Natalia and 23 companions of Nicomedia (4th c.)

"Husband and wife, they were both of noble and wealthy families in Nicomedia. Adrian was the governor of the Praetorium and a pagan, and Natalia was a secret Christian. They were both young, and had lived in wedlock for thirteen months in all before their martyrdom. When the wicked Emperor Maximian visited Nicomedia, he ordered that the Christians be seized and put to torture. There were twenty-three Christians hidden in a cave near the city. Someone handed them over to the authorities and they were cruelly flogged with leather whips and staves, and thrown into prison. They were then taken from prison and brought before the Praetor for their names to be noted. Adrian looked a these people, tortured but unbowed, peaceful and meek, and he put them under oath to say what they hoped for from their God, that they should undergo such tortures. They spoke to him of the blessedness of the righteous in the Kingdom of God. Hearing this, and again looking at these people, Adrian suddenly turned to the scribe and said: 'Write my name along with those of these saints; I also am a Christian.' When the Emperor heard of this, he asked him: 'Have you lost your mind?' Adrian replied: 'I haven't lost it, but found it!' Hearing this, Natalia rejoiced greatly, and, when Adrian sat chained with the others in prison, came and ministered to them all.

When they flogged her husband and put him to various tortures, she encouraged him to endure to the end. After long torture and imprisonment, the Emperor ordered that they be taken to the prison anvil, for their arms and legs to be broken with hammers. This was done and Adrian, along with the twenty-three others, breathed his last under the vicious tortures. Natalia took their relics to Constantinople and there buried them. After several days, Adrian appeared to her, bathed in light and beauty and calling her to come to God, and she peacefully gave her soul into her Lord's hands." (Prologue)

Our Holy Father Tithoës of the Thebaid (4th c.)

One of the great Egyptian Desert Fathers, he was a disciple of St Pachomius the Great and served as abbot of Tabennisi. Through his years of struggle in prayer, he attained to such purity of heart that whenever he raised his hands in prayer, his spirit was instantly caught up in pure contemplation of God. When one of the brethren asked him what path leads to humility, he answered 'The path of humility is abstinence, prayer and considering oneself as the least of all creatures.' He reposed in peace.

Day 26-Aug-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 1:26-29; Matthew 20:29-34

26 Consider your calling, brethren, that not many [among you] were wise according to the flesh, not many powerful, and not [many] of noble birth.
27 Nevertheless, God chose the foolish things of the world to put to shame those who are 'wise.
[Yes], God chose the weak things of the world in order to put to shame the things that are strong.
28 God also chose the lowly things of the world, the things that are despised and even the things that are 'nothing,' so that he might bring to nothing the things that are {thought to be important}; 29 so that no flesh should boast before God.

Gospel Reading:

29 As they were leaving Jericho, a great crowd was following Jesus.
30 Behold, two blind men were sitting by the road, and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, 'Lord, have mercy on us, you son of David!' 31 The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but the blind men cried out even more, 'Lord, have mercy on us, you son of David!' 32 Jesus stood still and called them, asking, 'What do you want me to do for you?' 33 They told him, 'Lord, that our eyes may be opened!' 34 Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes, and immediately their eyes received their sight, and they began to follow him.

Day 27-Aug-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Our Holy Father Poemen (Pimen) the Great (450)

"He was an Egyptian by birth and a great Egyptian ascetic. As a boy, he visited various spiritual teachers and gathered proven experience as a bee gathers honey from flowers. Pimen once begged the elder Paul to take him to St Païsius. Seeing him, Païsius said: 'This child will save many; the hand of God is on him.' In time, Pimen became a monk and drew two of his brothers to monasticism. Their mother once came to see her sons, but Pimen would not allow her in, asking through the door: 'Which do you want more: to see us here and now, or in the other world in eternity?' Their mother went away joy-fully, saying: 'If I will see you for certain there, I don't need to see you here.' In the monastery of these three brothers, governed by the eldest, Abba Anoub, the rule was as follows: at night, four hours were passed in manual work, four hours in sleep and four in reading the Psalter. The day was passed, from morning to noon, in alternate work and prayer, from mid-day to Vespers in reading and after Vespers they prepared their meal, the only one in the twenty--four hours, and this usually of some sort of cabbage. Pimen himself said about their life: 'We ate what was to hand. No-one ever said: "Give me something else", or "I won't eat that". In that way, we spent our whole life in silence and peace.' He lived in the fifth century, and entered peacefully into rest in great old age." (Prologue)

His name means "shepherd". Many of his words can be found in the Sayings of the Desert Fathers.

Apolytikion

With the rivers of your tears, you have made the barren desert fertile. Through sighs of sorrow from deep within you, your labors have borne fruit a hundred-fold. By your miracles you have become a light, shining upon the world. O Poemen, our Holy Father, pray to Christ our God, to save our souls.

Great-martyr Phanurius the Newly Appeared of Rhodes

"Little is known of the holy Martyr Phanurius, except that which is depicted concerning his martyrdom on his holy icon, which was discovered in the year 1500 among the ruins of an ancient church on Rhodes, when the Moslems ruled there. Thus he is called "the Newly-Revealed." The faithful pray to Saint Phanurius especially to help them recover things that have been lost, and because he has answered their prayers so often, the custom has arisen of baking the Phaneropita ('Phanarius-Cake') as a thank-offering." (Great Horologion)

There is a tradition that his mother was a great sinner, and that he was unable to convert her in her lifetime. After her death he prayed more for her salvation than for his own. As he was being stoned to death, he prayed: 'For the sake of these my sufferings, Lord, help all those who will pray to Thee for the salvation of Phanurius' sinful mother.' So, in Egypt, where he is much revered, many Christians pray 'O Lord, save Phanurius' mother and help me, a sinner.'

Apolytikion
A heavenly song of praise is brightly sung on the earth; the hosts of the Angels keep an earthly festival now in splendor and radiant joy; from on high, they praise with hymns the suff’rings and struggles; and below, the Church doth laud the heavenly glory thou foundest by thy contests and pains, O glorious Phanourios.

Day 27-Aug-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

12th Sunday of Matthew: The Rich Young Ruler
1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Matthew 19:16-26
15 Now I declare to you, brethren, the Good News which I preached to you, which also you accepted,a in which you also stand.
2 And you are saved by it, that is if you hold firmly to the word which I preached to you.
Otherwise, you believed in vain.
3 For I delivered to you, first of all, what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5and that he appeared to Kephas, then to the Twelve.
6 After that, he appeared to over five hundred brethren at once, most of whom remain [alive] until now, but some have also fallen asleep.
7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, 8 and last of all, as to the child born at the wrong time, he appeared to me also.
9 Indeed, I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God.
10 But by the grace of God, I am what I am.
His grace which was bestowed on me was not in vain, but I worked more than all of them- yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.
11 It does not matter whether is it I or they: this is what we preach, and so you believed.

Gospel Reading: 12th Sunday of Matthew: The Rich Young Ruler

16 Behold, a man came to him and asked, 'Good teacher, what good thing shall I do in order to have eternal life?' 17 Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but one, that is, God.
But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.
18 The man asked him, 'Which ones?' Jesus replied, "You shall not murder.
'You shall not commit adultery.
'You shall not steal.
'You shall not bear false witness.
19 'Honor your father and mother; and, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.
20 The young man then said to him, 'All these things I have observed from my

youth! What do I still lack?' 21 Jesus replied, 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have, give it to the poor, and you will have [a] treasure in heaven. Then come, and follow me!' 22 But when the young man heard , he went away sad because he was a person with great possessions.
23 Jesus said to his disciples, 'Amen I say to you: it will be hard for someone who is rich to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven! 24 Indeed, I tell you that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God.
25 When the disciples heard this, they were extremely astonished and said, 'Who then can be saved?' 26 Gazing at them, Jesus answered, 'By human resources, this is impossible, but with God all things are possible!'

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING
The Lord tells us, If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments! He goes on to remind us of the Ten Commandments, do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, honour your father and mother. Then he concludes, quoting the
Old Testament, love your neighbour as yourself (Levit. 19: 18). In the Gospel, Jesus elaborates on all these commandments.
In Matthew 5, he says that the commandment not to kill human beings extends to not being angry with them, not insulting them or calling them fools.
Usually, we consider our anger as the justified response to someone else's perceived aggression.
If we are to learn to set aside anger, we need to slow down our response to the behaviour of others, listen to them carefully and receive what they say with empathy.
Freedom from anger is the fruit of long practice.
It is not acquired on the strength of a decision or of being sorry for our outburst and going to confession.
In the absence of proper training, our anger will recur.
We dismiss people as fools when we do not take the time to analyse their circumstances.
Dismissiveness is a form of anger.
Adultery, cheating on one's wife or husband, is a cruel, extreme form of selfishness.
Bearing false witness can be a cold, calculated character assassination of a

person or a group.
But we also bear false witness when we make our own the prejudices of our group: nation, Church or any other association.
Group prejudices feed on generalisations.
Frequently, they are fabrications which we accept as true because people around us share the same prejudices.
These are weeds with deep roots.
Getting rid of them is arduous and requires the courage to distance ourselves from received ideas.
Honouring our father and mother means overlooking their shortcomings, not speaking evil of them, but putting ourselves out to be kind to them.
Loving our neighbour means acting in a loving way towards everyone, irrespective of their race, religion, or their personal history.
No individuals or sections of the human race can be excluded.
We are to work hard at defending our Christian convictions, and at the same time behave with respect and love towards those who oppose our views.
All the commandments mentioned by the Saviour are part of basic human decency.
We have an instinctive tendency to place ourselves in the category of decent people who are never in danger of breaking the essential commandments.
That is precisely the slippery slope towards disregarding the commandments without realising it when we are under pressure.
May the grace of God protect us from damaging our journey towards eternal life by breaking any of these commandments.
Amen. SAINT JOHN CASSIAN ON ANGER «When we are angry with others we should not seek solitude on the grounds that there, at least, no one will provoke us to anger, and that in solitude the virtue of long-suffering can easily be acquired. Our desire to leave our brethren is because of our pride, and because we do not wish to blame ourselves and ascribe to our own laxity the cause of our unruliness. So long as we assign the causes for our weaknesses to others, we cannot attain perfection in long-suffering. Self-reform and peace are not achieved through the patience which others show us, but through our own long-suffering towards our neighbour. When we try to escape the struggle for longsuffering by retreating into solitude, those unhealed passions we take there with us are merely hidden, not erased; for unless our passions are first purged, solitude and withdrawal from the world not only foster them but also keep them concealed, no longer allowing us to perceive what passion it is that enslaves us. On the contrary, they impose on us an illusion of virtue and persuade us to believe that we have achieved long-suffering and humility, because there is no one present to provoke and test us… Our passions grow fiercer when left idle through lack of contact with othe r people… We should always bear in mind our own ignorance of the time of our death, keeping ourselves from anger and recognizing that neither self-restraint nor the renunciation of all material things, nor fasting and vigils, are of any benefit if we are

found guilty at the last judgment because we are the slaves of anger and hatred».
 'Lift up and stretch out your hands, not to heaven, but to the poor; for if you stretch forth your hands to the poor, you have reached the summit of heaven; but if you lift up your hands in prayer without sharing with the poor, it is worth nothing. Every family should have a room where Christ is welcome in the person of the hungry and thirsty stranger. The poor are a greater temple than the sanctuary; this altar, the poor, you can raise up anywhere, on any street, and offer liturgy at any hour". (St John Chrysostom)

Day 28-Aug-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

St Moses of Ethiopia (400)

He is also called Moses the Black. He was a slave, but was cast out by his master due to his evil life. He then became the leader of a murderous band of robbers in Egypt. He came to repentance and took up monastic life in the desert under St Isidore of Sketis. For many years he struggled tirelessly, through prayer, fasting and vigils, with lustful and violent thoughts; he was finally freed of them through the prayers of St Isidore. He was revered by all the brethren for his ascetical life, his wisdom, and his deep humility. Once a brother committed some sin and the monks gathered to judge him. Moses at first refused to go at all, but when they insisted, he filled an old, leaky basket with sand and carried it into the assembly on his back. When the brethren asked him what his action meant, he said "My sins run out behind me, and I do not even see them, and I have come to judge my brother." The monk was forgiven. In time the fame of this humblest of monks spread so far that kings and bishops traveled into the desert to seek his wisdom and his blessing. In his old age, he was warned that a band of brigands was coming to attack the Skete. He refused to leave saying, "It is written: he who lives by the sword shall die by the sword." So, mindful that he had slain others by the sword, he willingly awaited his own murder. Six other monks who remained with him were also slain.

† Uncovering of the Relics of St Job of Pochaev (1651)

For his life see May 6.

Synaxis of the Holy Fathers of the Kiev Caves

Righteous Anna the Prophetess (1st c.)

Righteous Hezekiah, King of Judah (691 BC)

New Hieromartyr Chrysostom, metropolitan of Smyrna (1922)

Repose of Elder Joseph the Hesychast of Mt Athos (1959) (August 15 OC)

Born on the island of Paros in 1898, he entered monastic life in 1921 in response to a heavenly vision. Traveling to Mt Athos he first lived the communal monastic life, but later moved to a Skete for greater solitude. There

he received the gift of ceaseless prayer. Elder Joseph and his companion in struggle, Elder Arsenios, moved to St Anne's Skete, where they remained for the rest of their lives. Here a small company of disciples slowly gathered around them. Many of these, like silent Apostles, have spread out through the Orthodox world, contributing much to its spiritual renewal.

Day 28-Aug-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 2 Corinthians 8:7-15; Mark 3:6-12
7 Yes, as you overflow in everything: faith, speech, knowledge, devotion, and
[also] in your love for us, try to overflow even in this grace {of generous giving}.
8 I am not saying this as an order, but as testing your love by mentioning the
devotion of others.
9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: even though he was rich, yet
he became poor for your sake, so that by his poverty you might become rich.
10 I give my opinion in this matter: it would be the right thing to do for you, since a
year ago you were the first to do something (and this was also your will), 11 to
complete what you were doing.
Just as there was the readiness to be willing, may there [also] be completion {of
this project} according to your means.
12 If you are ready, the gift is acceptable according to what one has- not according
to what one does not have.
13 The goal is not that others may have it easy and that you would be in distress;
14 this is about a balancing out.
a In this present time, let your abundance make up for what others lack, so that
their abundance also may become a supply for what you lack; and may there be
equality.
15 As it is written, 'The one who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who
gathered little had no lack.

Gospel Reading:
6 The Pharisees went out and immediately began to conspire with the Herodians
against Jesus, [discussing] how they might get rid of him.
7 Jesus withdrew to the sea with his disciples, and a great crowd followed him
from Galilee, Judea, 8 Jerusalem, Idumaea beyond the Jordan, and also from
around Tyre and Sidon.
Hearing what great things Jesus was doing, a great multitude of people came to
him.
9 Jesus instructed his disciples to have a little boat stay near him because of the
crowd, so that they would not press on him.
10 For he had healed many people, so that as many as had diseases pressed on
him in order to touch him.

11 The unclean spirits, whenever they saw him, fell down before him and cried,
'You are the Son of God!' 12 He sternly warned them that they should not make
him known.

Day 29-Aug-2023 Tuesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Anastasios the New Martyr of Bulgaria

† The Beheading of the Glorious Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist John

Herod Antipas (son of the Herod who slew the children of Bethlehem at the time of Christ's birth) was ruler of Galilee when John the Baptist was preaching. He was married to the daughter of Aretas, an Arabian prince. But Herod, an evil sprout of an evil root, put away his lawful wife and unlawfully took Herodias as his concubine. Herodias was the wife of his brother Philip, who was still alive. John the Baptist stood up against the lawlessness and strongly denounced Herod. Herod then cast John into prison. During a banquet in his court at Sebastia in Galilee, Salome – Herodias and Philip's daughter – danced before the guests. Herod, drunk with wine, was so taken by this dance that he promised Salome anything she asked of him, even if it were half of his kingdom. Salome was persuaded by Herodias to ask for the head of John the Baptist. Herod gave the order, and John was beheaded in prison – and his head was presented to her on a platter. John's disciples took the body of their teacher by night and honourably buried it, but Herodias pierced John's tongue with a needle repeatedly, and buried his head in an unclean place. However, God's punishment quickly befell this group of evildoers. Prince Aretas, avenging his daughter's honour, waged war against Herod with his army and defeated him. The defeated Herod was sentenced by the Roman Caesar, Caligula, to exile (at first to Gaul, then later to Spain). Herod and Herodias lived lives of poverty and humiliation in exile, until the earth opened up and swallowed them. Salome died an evil death on the Sikaris (Sula) River. St. John's beheading occurred just before Passover, but its celebration on August 29 was established because a church that had been built over his grave in Sebastia (by Emperor Constantine and Empress Helena) was consecrated on August 29. The relics of John's disciples Eliseus and Audius were also placed in that church.

Source: St. Nikolai Velimirovic, The Prologue of Ohrid – Volume Two.

Apolytikion

The memory of the just is celebrated with hymns of praise, but the Lord's testimony is sufficient for thee, O Forerunner; for thou hast proved to be truly even more venerable than the Prophets, since thou was granted to baptize in the running waters Him Whom they proclaimed. Wherefore, having contested for the truth, thou didst rejoice to announce the good tidings even to those in Hades: that God hath appeared in the flesh, taking away the sin of the world and granting us great mercy.

Kontakion

The glorious beheading of the Forerunner was a certain divine dispensation, that the coming of the Saviour might also be preached to those in Hades. Let Herodias lament, then, that she demanded a wicked murder; for she loved not the Law of God, nor eternal life, but one false and fleeting.

Our Holy Mother Theodora of Salonica (879)

"A wealthy and devout woman, she lived on the island of Aegina, but, when the Arabs over-ran the island, she moved to Salonica. There, she gave her only daughter to a monastery, where she received the monastic name Theopista. Her husband Theodorinus died very soon, and then Theodora became a nun. She was a great ascetic. She often heard angelic singing, and would say to her sisters: 'Don't you hear how wonderfully the angels are singing in heavenly light?' She entered into rest in 879, and a healing myrrh flowed from her body, which gave healing to many.

Day 29-Aug-2023 Tuesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 2 Corinthians 8:16-9:5; Mark 3:13-19
16 But thanks be to God who puts into Titus' heart the same devotion for you.
17 He has accepted our exhortation, but since he was very eager, he [actually] went out to you of his own accord.
18 We have sent along with him the brother whose praise in the Good News is known in all the Churches.
19 In fact, he was also appointed by the Churches to accompany us in this grace, which we administer to the glory of the Lord himself, and to show our zeal.
20 There is one thing that we want to avoid: that anyone should blame us about this general gift which we administer.
21 We endeavor to act honorably, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.
22 We have sent with them our brother who has proven his eagerness in many ways, but now he is even more eager because of his great confidence in you.
23 Regarding Titus: he is my partner and fellowworker for your sake.
As for our brothers, they are the apostles of the Churches, the glory of Christ.
24 Therefore, demonstrate your love to them before the Churches; show that we were right to boast about you to them.
9 The ministry to the saints It is not needed that I should write to you about the ministry to the saints.
2 Indeed, I know that you are ready and I boast about you to the Macedonians, that you in Achaia have been ready since last year.
Your zeal has encouraged very many of them! 3But I have sent the brothers, so that our boasting about you may not be in vain in this respect: as I have said, be prepared.
4 Otherwise, if anyone from Macedonia comes with us and finds you unprepared, we (to say nothing of you) would be disappointed in this confident boasting [about you].
5 Therefore, I thought it necessary to ask the brothers to reach you first in order to arrange ahead of time the generous gift which you promised before.
Thus, may the gift be ready as a matter of generosity, not greediness.

Gospel Reading:
13 Jesus went up into the mountain and called to himself those he wanted and they came to him.

14 He appointed twelve to be with him, to send them out to preach, 15 and to have
authority to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons.
[They were:] 16 Simon, to whom he gave the name Peter; 17 James the son of
Zebedee and John, the brother of James, to whom he gave the name Boanerges
which means 'Sons of Thunder;'
18 Andrew; Philip; Bartholomew; Matthew; Thomas; James, the son of Alphaeus;
Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot;
19 and Judas Iscariot, who was to betray him.

Day 30-Aug-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Afterfeast of the Beheading of St John the Baptist

Synaxis of Serbian Hierarchs

On this day are commemorated seventeen holy Serbian hierarchs, beginning with St Sava (Sabbas), first Archbishop of Serbia and Equal to the Apostles. They are:

- St Sava, first Archbishop of Serbia, Equal to the Apostles
- Arsenius, his successor
- Sava II, son of King Stephen the First-Crowned
- Nicodemus, who lived on the Holy Mountain, was abbot of Hilandar Monastery there and Archbishop of Serbia
- Joannicius, patriarch from 1346-1349
- Ephraim, chosen as patriarch against his will in 1376. He crowned Prince Lazar, then renounced the patriarchal throne and retired into solitude
- Spiridon, his successor (+1388)
- Macarius, a great restorer of old churches and monasteries; printed many Church books (+1574)
- Gabriel, a nobleman by birth. the Prologue says that he 'took part in the Moscow Council under Patriarch Nikhon, because of which he was tortured by the Turks for treason and hanged in 1656.'
- In addition, Eustace, Jacob, Danilo, Sava III, Gregory, John, Maxim and Nikhon.

The vital connection between the Serbian church and the Holy Mountain is obvious here; many of these hierarchs lived and struggled on Mt Athos.

Sts Alexander (340), John (595), and Paul the New (784), patriarchs of Constantinople

St Alexander took part in the First Ecumenical Council as delegate of Patriarch Metrophanes, who was too frail to attend; and succeeded Metrophanes on the Patriarchal throne. By his prayer to God that the Church might be spared the schemings of Arius, Arius was struck dead.

St John is, by one account, St John the Faster (Sept. 2), who reposed in 595; by another, St John Scholasticus (Feb. 21), who reposed in 577.

St Paul was Patriarch for five years, then renounced the Patriarchal throne to take the Great Schema.

Day 30-Aug-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 2 Corinthians 9:12-10:7; Mark 3:20-27
12 This ministry of giving which you perform does not only make up for what the saints are lacking; it also overflows into thanksgiving to God.
13 Seeing that you prove yourselves by this service, the saints glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the Good News of Christ, and also for the generosity of your contribution to them and to all.
14 As for them, with supplication on your behalf, they are devoted to you by reason of the exceeding grace of God in you.
15 Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift! 10 Paul defends his person and ministry I, Paul, entreat you by the humility and gentleness of Christ, as one who is humble among you in your presence but bold in my absence.
2 Yes, I beg that I should not have to be bold when I am actually with you by daring to oppose those who think we are acting according to human standards.
3 Even though we walk in the flesh, we do not wage war according to the flesh.
4 The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to overthrow strongholds, 5 to cast down fantasies and every lofty thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.
6 Once you have given your complete obedience, we are prepared to chastise any disobedience.
7 Do you look at things only as they appear in your presence? If anyone trusts that he belongs to Christ, let such a person reconsider this, that, we belong to Christ as much as he does!

Gospel Reading:
Jesus returned [to his] home and 20 again, the crowd assembled, so much that they could not even eat bread.
21 When his own [friends] heard it, they came to take charge of him, saying, 'He is insane!'
22 The scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He is possessed by Beelzebul,' and, 'He is casting out demons by the [authority of the] prince of the demons!'
23 Jesus called them and spoke to them in parables: 'How can Satan cast out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.
25 If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.

26 If Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but has [come to] an end.
27 But no one can enter into the house of a strong man in order to plunder it, unless he first binds the strong man.
Then he will plunder his house.

Day 31-Aug-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

† The Placing of the Sash of the Most Holy Theotokos (395-408? 886- 912?)

At the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos, her sash came into the possession of the Apostle Thomas and after various transfers came to Cappadocia. It was later taken from there to Constantinople, where it was kept in a sealed casket in the Church of the Theotokos at Blachernae, at the time of the Emperor Arcadius (395-408). The casket was not opened until the reign of the Emperor Leo the Wise (886-912), when the Empress Zoe, who was ill, had a vision in which she was told to have the sash placed upon her. The Emperor obtained the blessing of the Patriarch, the sash was placed upon the Empress, and she was immediately healed. Some accounts say that today's feast celebrates the bringing of the sash to Constantinople; others that it commemorates the miraculous healing of the Empress.

Hieromartyr Cyprian, bishop of Carthage (258)

He was born around 190 to pagan parents in North Africa. Before baptism he was distinguished in Carthage as a teacher of philosophy and rhetoric. He came to faith in Christ and was baptized at a young age; as soon as he became a Christian he abandoned his prestigious teacher's position, sold his many possessions and gave all his wealth to the poor. He was ordained presbyter in 247, Bishop of Carthage in 248. He was known for his gentleness and paternal care for his flock, combined with firm opposition to heretics. His extensive writings still guide the Church today.

For his confession of Christ, he was beheaded under the Emperor Valerian on September 14; since that is the date of the Exaltation of the Cross, his feast is kept today. At the time of his execution he left twenty-five gold pieces (a huge sum) for the executioner who beheaded him.

Apolytikion

Guide of Orthodoxy, teacher of piety and holiness, luminary of Carthage, God-inspired adornment of confessors, O wise Cyprian, by thy teachings thou has enlightened all, O harp of the Spirit. Intercede with Christ God that our souls be saved.

St Gennadius, Patriarch of Constantinople (471)

He was known for his gentleness and his ascetical way of life. He would not ordain any man who did not know the Psalter by heart. He presided at a local council in which simony in the Church was anathematized. In his own lifetime he worked miracles, and he was told the time of his death in a vision. The famous monastery of Studion was built in his time, with his blessing. He reposed in peace.

Saint Aidan of Lindisfarne (651)

Around AD 635, Saint Oswald (5 August), King of Northumbria, appealed to the monks of the Monastery of Iona to send missionaries to his mostly-pagan kingdom. (An earlier mission had ended with the death of St Edwin in 633.) The fathers of the monastery chose St Aidan and consecrated him bishop. He founded a monastery (and his episcopal seat) on the island of Lindisfarne, and undertook missionary journeys, always on foot, throughout the kingdom, with King Oswald often accompanying him and serving as his interpreter. He lived in great poverty, using all the gifts he received as alms for the poor or to buy back captives and slaves. He was the spiritual father of St Hilda (17 Nov.), and founded the first women's monasteries in Northumbria. He reposed in peace in 651, and was buried at Lindisfarne.

Note: Northumbria was an Anglo-Saxon kingdom in what is now northeastern England and southern Scotland.

Day 31-Aug-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: 2 Corinthians 10:7-18; Mark 3:28-35

7 Do you look at things only as they appear in your presence? If anyone trusts that
he belongs to Christ, let such a person reconsider this, that, we belong to Christ as
much as he does!
8 Even though I should boast some more about our authority, (which the Lord gave
for building you up, and not for casting you down), would that not be a shame?
9 May I not appear to desire to terrify you by my letters! 10 Some people say, 'His
letters are profound and strong, but his physical presence is weak and his speech
is worthless.
11 Let such people consider this: that what we are in word by letters (when we are
absent), we are exactly the same in actions when we are present.
12 We are not venturing to rank or compare ourselves with those who commend
themselves.
But as they measure themselves by their own standards and compare themselves
with themselves, they are without understanding.
13 However, we will not boast beyond proper limits, only within the boundaries
which God has appointed to us, which reach even to you.
14 In fact, we do not stretch ourselves too much, as though we did not reach to
you.
For we even reached as far as to you with the Good News of Christ, 15 not
boasting beyond proper limits in the work of others, but having hope that as your
faith grows, our [missionary] field among you will be greatly enlarged.
16 This way, we will be able to preach the Good News even to those areas that are
beyond you, in order not to boast in what others have already accomplished.
17 But 'whoever boasts, let him boast in the Lord!'a 18 Truly, it is not the one who
commends himself who is approved, but it is the Lord who gives [him] approval.

Gospel Reading:

28 Amen, all human sins will be forgiven, and all the blasphemies ever uttered; 29
but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is
guilty of an eternal sin.
30 [He spoke these words] because they had said, 'He has an unclean spirit!' 31
His mother and his brothers came and, standing outside, sent in a message asking
for him.
32 A large group was sitting around him, and they told him, 'Behold, your mother

and your brothers are standing outside, looking for you.
33 He answered them, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' 34 Looking around at those who sat around him, he said, 'Behold, my mother and my brothers! 35 For whoever does the will of God is my brother, and my sister, and mother.

Day 01-Sep-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

The Beginning of the Church's Year

The First Ecumenical Council established that the Church's year would begin on September 1st, continuing the practice of the Roman Empire at that time. For centuries, the beginning of the civil year coincided with the Church year, but later changed, first in western Europe, then in Russia in the time of Peter the Great.

† Our Holy Father Symeon Stylites (459)

Born in Syria, he was a shepherd, but at the age of eighteen he left home and became a monk, practicing the strictest asceticism. At times he fasted for forty days. After a few years at a monastery he took up an ascetical discipline unique at that time: mounting a pillar, he stood on it night and day in prayer. Though he sought only seclusion and prayer, his holiness became famous, and thousands would make pilgrimage to receive a word from him or to touch his garments. Countless nomadic Arabs came to faith in Christ through the power of his example and prayers. To retreat further from the world, he used progressively taller pillars: his first pillar was about ten feet high, his final one about fifty. He was known also for the soundness of his counsel: he confirned the Orthodox doctrine at the Council of Chalcedon and persuaded the Empress Eudocia, who had been seduced by Monophysite beliefs, to return to the true Christian faith. After about forty years lived in asceticism, he reposed in peace at the age of sixty-nine.

He was at first suspected of taking up his way of life out of pride, but his monastic brethren confirmed his humility thus: They went to him as a group, and told him that the brotherhood had decided that he should come down from his pillar and rejoin them. Immediately he began to climb down from the pillar. Seeing his obedience and humility, they told him to remain with their blessing.

Righteous Joshua, Son of Nun

In the Septuagint he is called Jesus, the Greek form of Joshua. Of the Hebrews who fled Egypt in the Exodus, only he and Caleb were found worthy to enter the Promised Land. He was Moses' chosen successor to lead the Hebrew people. Read his story in the

Old Testament book that bears his name. He reposed at the age of 110, about 1500 years before Christ.

Saint Meletios the Younger (1095-1124)

He was born in Cappadocia around 1035. He became a monk in Constantinople, but after a few years he went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem and Rome, then settled at a small monastery near Thebes. Here Meletios became known for his piety: he wore one garment of woven horsehair and, as the Synaxarion says, 'never let his eyelids slumber without having bathed the mat he lay on with his tears.' After twenty-eight years of ascetical labors Meletius, seeking to escape his increasing renown, departed the monastery, eventually settling near the Monastery of the Bodiless Powers near Myoupolis in Greece. Here he thought that he would be able to pray in obscurity, but once again the fame of his virtues attracted a monastic community around him. By order of the Patriarch of Constantinople he was ordained to the priesthood and, much against his will, made abbot of the monastic colony. The Emperor Alexander Comnenus wished to give a large gift of money to the monastery, but the Saint, unwilling to store up wealth on earth, would only accept enough for the essential needs of his monks: 'but' (the Synaxarion says) 'as a sign of gratitude, he protected the pious Emperor in all his campaigns from that time forth, by his prayer.' After many years caring for the monastery, in which he revealed gifts of healing, insight and prophecy, Saint Meletios reposed in peace, aged about seventy years, sometime between 1095 and 1124.

Holy New Martyr Angelis (1680)

He was a goldsmith living in Constantinople. While he was celebrating the Dormition of the Theotokos with some friends in a nearby village, the party was joined by some Turkish neighbors. The Christians and Turks drank a great amount together, and at one point entertained themselves by exchanging headgear. The next day, when everyone had sobered up, a Turk asked Angelis why he was not wearing a Muslim turban, for wearing it once was a sign of conversion. (To our knowledge this is not Islamic law, but was a ploy to pressure the young Angelis into conversion.) The dismayed Angelis was brought before a judge and given the choice of converting to Islam or being put to torture and death. Though the young man had shown little seriousness about his faith before this, he was filled with the Holy Spirit and boldly confessed Christ, willingly accepting a Martyr's end. He was beheaded on Sunday, September 1, 1680.

40 Holy Women Martyrs of Thrace

Day 01-Sep-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 2 Corinthians 11:5-12; Mark 4:1-9
5 However, I do not consider myself inferior to the superlative apostles:b 6
although I am unskilled in speech, I am not unskilled in knowledge.
No, in every way, what we are has been revealed to you in all [these] things.
7 Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I
preached God's Good News to you free of charge? 8 I 'robbed' other Churches,
taking wages from them, so that I might serve you! 9 When I was present with you
and found myself in need, I was not a burden on anyone because when the
brothers came from Macedonia, they provided according to my need.
In everything, I have refrained from being a burden to you, and I will continue to do
so.
10 As the truth of Christ is in me, no one will stop me from this boasting in the
regions of Achaia.
11 Why do I say this? Because I do not love you? God knows that I do! 12 But
what I do, I will keep doing, in order that those who wish to boast as we do may
have no such occasion.
Gospel reading:

4 About the use of parables Again he began to teach by the seaside.
A great crowd was gathered close to him, so that he got into a boat in the lake and
sat down while the people were on the shore.
2 He taught them many things in parables, saying, 3'Listen! A farmer went out to
sow.
4 As he sowed, some seed fell by the road and the birds came and devoured it.
5 Others fell on the rocky ground where it had little soil and it sprang up right away.
Because the soil was shallow, 6 when the sun came, it was scorched; and since it
had no root, it withered away.
7 Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns grew up, choked it and it produced
no fruit.
8 Others fell into the good ground and produced fruit, growing up and increasing,
some multiplying thirty times, some sixty times, and some a hundred times.
9 Then Jesus said, 'Anyone who has ears for listening should listen!'

Day 02-Sep-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Martyr Mamas of Caesarea in Cappadocia (275), and his parents, Martyrs Theodotus and Rufina

He began his life in the cruelest of circumstances: both of his parents were imprisoned for their faith in Christ. First his father, Theodotus, died in prison, then his mother, Rufina, died shortly after his birth, so the infant was left alone in prison beside the bodies of his parents. But an angel appeared to the widow Ammia, telling her to go to the prison and rescue the child. Ammia obtained the city governor's permission to bury the parents and bring the child home. He was called Mamas because he was mute until the age of five and his first word was `Mama'. Despite his late beginning, he showed unusual intelligence and, having been brought up in piety, soon openly proclaimed his Christian faith. When he was only fifteen years old he was arrested and brought before the Emperor Aurelian. The Emperor, perhaps seeking to spare the boy, told him to deny Christ only with his lips, and the State would not concern itself with his heart. Mamas replied `I shall not deny my God and King Jesus Christ either in my heart or with my lips.' He was sent to be tortured, but miraculously escaped and lived in the mountains near Caesarea. There he lived in solitude and prayer and befriended many wild beasts. In time, he was discovered by the persecutors and stabbed to death with a trident by a pagan priest.

St John IV, Patriarch of Constantinople, known as John the Faster (595)

He was born and raised in Constantinople. When he came of age he worked as a goldsmith and an engraver at the mint; but, renouncing worldly things, he was ordained a deacon and given charge of the distribution of alms in Constantinople. He gave freely to all with no consideration of their worthiness. The Synaxarion says 'the more he distributed the more God filled his purse, so that it seemed inexhaustible.'

Upon the death of Patriarch Eutyches in 582, John became Patriarch and

reigned for thirteen years, reposing in peace in 595. (It was during his reign that the term "Ecumenical Patriarch" began to be used to refer to the Patriarch of Constantinople.) St John was known for his great asceticism and fasting, and as a powerful intercessor and wonderworker. So generous was he to the poor that he used up all his funds in almsgiving and had to ask the Emperor for a loan, which he used to give more alms. After his repose, his only possessions were found to be an old cassock, a linen shirt and a wooden spoon.

Righteous Eleazar, son of Aaron and second High Priest of Israel

He was the son of Aaron, the first High Priest of Israel, and he in turn became the second High Priest. He reposed in peace.

Repose of Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose) of Platina (1982). (August 20 OC)

This modern-day pioneer of Orthodoxy and monasticism in America has not been glorified as a Saint of the Church, though many individuals ask his prayers and icons of him have been painted.

Eugene Rose was born in 1934 in California, where he spent all his life. Following an intense spiritual search that took him through study of several Eastern Religions (he earned a graduate degree in Chinese Philosophy), he providentially encountered the Russian Orthodox community in San Francisco, and in 1962 was received into the Orthodox Church. The sanctity of Archbishop (now Saint) John Maximovich was especially important to his development in the Faith.

After a few more years living in the world, he and his friend Gleb Podmosensky founded a small monastic brotherhood in the wilderness of far northern California; in time they were tonsured as monks and ordained as priests: Fr Seraphim and Fr Herman. At a time when Orthodoxy was almost invisible in North America, the monastery became a beacon of Orthodoxy for Americans seeking an authentic Christian faith.

Fr Seraphim reposed in 1982 at the age of forty-eight. Many of his writings are still in print. A biography, Father Seraphim Rose: His life and works, by Hieromonk Damascene, is highly recommended.

Day 02-Sep-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 2:6-9; Matthew 22:15-22

6 However, we [do] speak wisdom among those who are full grown; yet it is a
wisdom 'not of this world,' nor of the rulers of this world, who are coming to
nothing.
7 Instead, we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the wisdom that was hidden,
which God had foreordained before the ages for our glory, 8 [a wisdom] which
none of the rulers of this world recognized.
For if they had recognized this wisdom,c they would not have crucified the Lord of
glory!d 9 But as it is written: Things which an eye did not see, and an ear did not
hear, Which did not enter into the heart of man, These God has prepared for those
who love him.

Gospel Reading:

15 Then the Pharisees went off and took counsel on how they might ensnare
Jesus in his talk.
16 They sent their own disciples to Jesus, along with the Herodians, and asked,
'Teacher, we know that you are honest and that you teach the way of God in truth.
You are not swayed by men because you pay no attention to who they are.
17 Tell us therefore, what do you think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?'
18 But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, 'Why do you test me, you
hypocrites? 19 Show me the tax money.
They brought him a denarius.
20 Jesus asked them, 'Whose image and inscription is this?' 21They answered,
'Caesar's.
Then he said to them, 'Give therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and
to God the things that are God's.
22 When they heard this [reply], they were amazed, and leaving him, they went
away.

Day 03-Sep-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Hieromartyr Anthimos, bishop of Nicomedia, and those with him (303-304)

"After the death of the 20,000 Martyrs of Nicomedia (see Dec. 28), their Bishop Anthimos fled to a certain village to care for his remaining flock. The Emperor Maximian sent men in search of him. When they found him, he promised to show Anthimos to them, but first took them in as guests, fed them, and only then made himself known to them. Amazed at his kindness, the soldiers promised him to tell Maximian that they had not found him. But Anthimos went willingly with them, and converting them by his admonitions, baptized them on the way. He boldly confessed his Faith before Maximian, and after frightful tortures was beheaded in the year 303 or 304." (Great Horologion)

Our Holy Father Theoctistus, Fellow Ascetic of St Euthymius (451), is also commemorated today. A faithful disciple of St Euthymius, he was abbot of St Euthymius' monastery in Palestine until his repose in peace at the age of ninety.

Holy Martyr Basilissa (309)

She lived near Nicomedia during the great persecution by the Emperor Diocletian. Though she was only nine years old, she was arrested and brought before Alexander, the Governor of Bithynia. When she fearlessly proclaimed her faith in Christ, the Governor had her stripped and beaten, but she only gave thanks to God. Enraged at the steadfastness of a mere child, the Governor ordered her chained and plunged head-first into boiling pitch, then cast into a blazing furnace, then thrown to the lions. Through all these torments she was miraculously preserved. Astonished at the wonders that he beheld, Alexander fell at Basilissa's feet and confessed that he too believed that Christ is the Savior. He was baptized by the Bishop of Nicomedia and died not long afterward. Basilissa went into the wilderness outside the city to give thanks to God for her endurance under torture and to ask Him to receive her soul in peace. While praying in this way, she entered into her rest.

Our Holy Father Joannicius, Archbishop and first Patriarch of Serbia (1354)

"Born in Prizrem, he served as first secretary to King Dušan. He became Archbishop in 1339, and in 1346 was raised to the rank of Patriarch. He was a zealous pastor, and brought order to the Serbian Church, being 'a great

upholder of the Church's laws'. He entered into rest on September 3rd, 1349, and his relics are preserved at Pec´." (Prologue)

Day 03-Sep-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

The Parable of the Vineyard
1 Corinthians 16:13-24; Matthew 21:33-42
13 Watch! Stand firm in the faith! Be courageous! Be strong! 14 Let all that you do be done in love.
15 Now I beg you, brethren (you know the house of Stephanas, that it is the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to serve the saints), 16 that you also be in service to people like this to everyone who helps in the work and labors.
17 I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus; for what was lacking on your part, they supplied.
18 They refreshed my spirit and yours; show therefore your appreciation to such people.
19 The Churches of Asia greet you.
Aquila and Priscilla greet you much in the Lord, together with the Church that is in their house.
20 All the brethren greet you.
Greet one another with a holy kiss! 21This greeting is by me, Paul, with my own hand.
22 If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed.
a Maranatha! 23 May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.
24 My love is with you all in Christ Jesus.
Amen.

Gospel Reading: The Parable of the Vineyard

33 Hear another parable.
There was a man who was the owner of a household.
He planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a winepress in it, built a tower and leased it out to farmers.
He then left for another country.
34 When the season for the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the farmers, to receive his fruit.
35 But the farmers took his servants, beat one, killed another, and stoned yet another.
36 Again, the owner sent other servants, even more than the first time; and they treated them in the same way.

37 Then, he sent his son to them, saying: 'They will respect my son!' 38 But the farmers, when they saw the son, said to each other, 'This is the heir! Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.
39 And so, they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.
40 Therefore, when the lord of the vineyard returns, what will he do with those farmers?' 41 They answered him, 'He will bring those wretches to a wretched end and he will lease out the vineyard to other farmers who will give him the fruit in its season.
42 Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The [very] stone which the builders rejected was made the head of the corner.
This was from the Lord and it is marvelous in our eyes?'

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit! Today the Holy Gospel again tells us the parable of Christ about a vineyard – the saddest and bitterest parable about cruelty of mankind.
This parable is about how the Lord calls upon people, waits for their answer, sends His messengers and envoys.
But the people don’t want to receive them and listen to them, rise against them, up to the rising against the Son Himself who was sent by the Heaven.
But the master from this parable didn’t simply send his servants to the vineyard.
He expected the tenants of this vineyard to give some fruit of their work to their master, landowner, because neither the land nor the vineyard belonged to them.
If we think over it, we will understand at once that everything we have doesn’t belong to us either.
Everything has been given to us.
And the life itself has been given to us.
Today we have it, but tomorrow we may lose it.
And the health itself has been given to us.
Today we have it but tomorrow we may lose it.

A lot of things we have, don't belong to us, but are a gift which we may lose.
And as it is a gift of God, we must increase it and return something to the One Who gave it to us.
According to the patristic interpretation, the landowner who planted the vineyard is the Lord God and grapes are the chosen Judaist people.
The fence round the vineyard is the Law of Moses which protected the people of God from paganism and obscentity.
A tower and a winepress in the middle of the vineyard are the church and a sacrificial alter, the tenants who were given the vineyard by the master, are Judaist elders and priests whom the Lord entrusted His people.
The servants sent by the master for the fruit and trashed and killed by the vinedressers are the prophets of God.
The master's Son who was killed is the only-begotten Son of God, having been put to death by the high-priests and the Pharisees.
The wretched death of the wretched vinedressers carried out by the owner is future destruction of Israel by Roman forces and other vinedressers, who will be rented out this vineyard, are pastors of the Christ Church to guard God's people, who since the Pentecost have been any people who accepted the Saviour.
Since the coming of Christ the new vineyard of God has been spreading all over the world.
The whole mankind is included in this vineyard.
And this new vineyard is the Christ Church with the Apostles, Martyrs, Saints, Confessors, Venerables, pious kings and queens – all those, who work properly in the Lord's vineyard.
This is a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, as the Word of God tells us. [1 Peter 2,9]
When we confessed and came up to the Communion Cup, we, thus, testify to our wish to come to Him.
His light has penetrated us.
Let's try to feel how this light illuminates all dark ins and outs of our soul.
Let's try to tell ourselves that we don't want to be those careless slaves.
O, Lord, you send me your omens and I will try to listen to them, I will try to hear them, I will try to change my short life and make it worthy of Your call, Your holiness, our love.
And then, if you come to me, when my life is weighed on scales, when the harvest time in the vineyard comes and you will tell me – You have done little because of your sickness, but you have done this little work in aspiration of your heart and I will accept it with love.
But how sad it will be if it turns out that we have nothing, all is empty and fruitless.
Then, the end of our way will be as sad as the end of this parable.
How often the people, who imagined that they had a grace and spiritual wealth, turned out to be rejected.
Let it not be with us! Therefore, the Lord's Word is not only the Word of

consolation, not only the Word of encouragement and love but also the Word of warning to protect all of us from evil and everlasting destruction.
Amen.

Day 04-Sep-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Hieromartyr Babylas, bishop of Antioch, and those with him (251)

He was archbishop of Antioch at the time of the wicked Emperor Numerian. Once the Emperor came to Antioch and attempted to enter a church where Babylas was serving. Coming to the door, the Archbishop forbade the Emperor, as a pagan and a shedder of innocent blood, to enter the house where the True God was worshipped. Retreating in humiliation, the Emperor determined to take his revenge. Shortly after he had Babylas imprisoned along with several Christian children. Babylas was made to watch the beheading of each of the children. Having given them encouragement he submitted himself to beheading. At his own request he was buried in the chains with which he had been bound.

After the establishment of Christianity in the Roman Empire, the Emperor Gallus had a church built in honor of Babylas near the site of a temple to Apollos at Daphne, outside Antioch. (This was where, according to pagan legend, the maiden Daphne had been turned into a tree to escape the lust of Apollos). When Julian the Apostate came to Antioch in 362 to consult a famous oracle there, he found that the oracle had been deprived of its power by the presence of a Christian church nearby. He ordered the relics of St Babylas to be dug up and removed from the Church. As soon as this had been done a thunderbolt destroyed the shrine of Apollo, which Julian did not dare to rebuild. Saint John Chrysostom, then Archbishop of Antioch, preached a sermon on these events within a generation after their occurrence.

Holy Prophet Moses, who beheld God.

What can we say of Moses? For his story read the Old Testament books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The Church holds him to be the author of the Pentateuch or Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament.

St John Mavropos, Metropolitan of Euchaita (1100)

He is best known for his part in the institution of the Synaxis of Sts Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom (see January 30). The three holy hierarchs appeared to him and revealed that all three are united

and equally honored in heaven, thus dispelling a spirit of factionalism that was disturbing Constantinople. He is the composer of the Canon to the Most Sweet Jesus and the Canon to the Guardian Angel, both found in many prayer books. He reposed in peace. Mavropos is a nickname meaning 'Black-foot'.

He is commemorated on June 14 on the Slavic Calendar.

St Hermione, daughter of Apostle Philip (1st c.)

She was one of the four daughters of the Apostle Philip the Deacon (October 11). As we read in the Acts of the Apostles (21:8), all four were virgins and prophets. Her fame as a prophetess and a worker of miraculous healings attracted the attention of the Emperor Hadrian, under whose tribunal she was cruelly tortured. It is written that throughout her torments the only sounds that came from her lips were verses of the Psalms. At last she was sentenced to death; when the executioners raised the sword to behead her they were struck with paralysis, but St Hermione healed them by her prayer. At this, the executioners believed in Christ and laid down the sword. Saint Hermione was buried at Ephesus.

Venerable Anthimos the Blind, New Ascetic (1782)

He was born on the island of Kephalonia in 1727, with the name Athanasios Kourouklis. At the age of seven he became blind as a result of smallpox. His devout mother prayed for his healing, and asked her priest to serve forty Ligurgies for her son's healing. At the fortieth Liturgy, as the priest said 'In the fear of God and with faith and love draw near,' Athanasius cried out that he could see the priest's vestments and chalice. He had recovered sight in his right eye. For a time he followed his father's occupation as a seaman, but then took up the life of a monk, receiving the name Anthimos. At some point he went blind again, and soon thereafter had a vision: he was praying for the restoration of his sight before an icon of the Theotokos when two young men in radiant garments appeared and led him to the Mother of God herself, who told him 'Depart, for your continual prayer that I restore your sight is not profitable to you.' But the two young men pleaded for him, and the Theotokos said 'Anthimos, because of your great piety and many prayers, I will restore your sight in part, but do not forget that, having gained temporal vision, you can lose that which is eternal.' Thereafter, though Anthimos was almost completely blind, he could dimly discern the outlines of objects; but in compensation he was granted the gift of spiritual insight,and was able to predict the future and call by name those he had never met.

Saint Anthimos was about twenty when he entered monastic life, and lived on Mt Athos for awhile. Despite his blindness, he then took up a life of missionary work that took him throughout the Greek mainland and islands. Traveling from place to place he preached the Gospel, healed the sick, founded several monasteries. Once he restored a blind woman's sight by his prayers, though he himself remained blind throughout his life. Throughout his amazing labors he maintained a life of the most severe asceticism, eating little, sleeping on a plank or on the floor.

In 1782, in the course of one of his many sea journeys, he told the sailors to change course for Kephalonia, saying 'God's will is not that I concern myself with [the mission he had undertaken], but that I go back and die in my monastery.' On returning he fell ill and called his spiritual children to him. 'My children, the hour has come for me to go where the Lord ordains. Death is the common lot of us all and is nothing to be afraid of. It is important rather to do your best to keep your promises and your monastic vows. The one thing necessary in this life is to please God and save your souls.' Having said this, he fell asleep in peace, at the age of fifty-four. He was glorified as a Saint in 1976.

Note: It is sometimes said that celebrating Divine Liturgies for special intentions is 'not Orthodox.' The example of St Anthimos' mother shows that the practice is a both traditional and efficacious.

Holy New Martyr Gorazd, Bishop of Slovakia and the Czech Lands (1942) (August 22 OC)

He was born in 1879 in Moravia and given the name Matthew Pavlik. He became a Roman Catholic priest, active in a movement for reform within the Roman Catholic Church. When Czechoslovakia became an independent state in 1919, about 800,000 Christians, including Fr Matthew, approached Bishop Dositheus of the Orthodox Patriarchate of Serbia, asking to be received into the Orthodox faith. Father Matthew was received into the Church in 1920; a year later was made Bishop of the Orthodox of Moravia and Silesia by Patriarch Demetrius of Serbia, and was named for St Gorazd, a disciple of St Methodius (July 27). Though many of the original 'reform' leaders turned back, finding the demands of Orthodoxy too difficult, Bishop Gorazd labored mightily for the restoration of Orthodoxy in Czechoslovakia: he established eleven parishes, translated the divine services into Czech, and published a Czech Prayer Book.

During the Second World War, two priests of the Orthodox Cathedral in Prague were arrested because some of the Czech resistance had taken refuge in the Cathedral. It was clear that the Nazis were planning retaliation against the entire Orthodox Church. Bishop Gorazd presented himself to the Nazis and, to save his priests, took full responsibility for the events in the Cathedral. He was arrested, tortured and finally shot on September 4 1942 (August 22 OC). Despite his selfless sacrifice, the Orthodox Church was

severely persecuted by the Nazis: all the churches were closed and the priests sent to concentration camps in Germany.

Saint Gorazd was glorified by the Church of Serbia in 1961 and by the Patriarchate of Constantinople in 1987.

Day 04-Sep-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 2 Corinthians 12:10-19; Mark 4:10-23
10 Therefore, I take pleasure in weaknesses, in injuries, necessities, persecutions, distresses, {all this} for Christ's sake.
For when I am weak, then I am strong! 11 I have acted foolishly in this boasting, but you compelled me! I should have been commended by you, because even though I am nothing, I am not in anything inferior to the very best apostles.
12 Truly, the signs of an apostle were worked among you in all patience, in signs, wonders and mighty deeds.
13 Were you in any way made inferior to the rest of the Churches, except that I was not a [financial] burden to you? Forgive me this wrong! Concerns for the Corinthians 14 Here I am, ready to visit you for the third time, and I will not be a burden to you.
I do not seek your possessions, I seek you! Is it not the parents who should be saving for their children, not the children for their parents? 15 I will most gladly spend [for you] and be spent for your souls.
If I overflow with love for you, am I loved less? 16 Be that as it may, I did not place a burden on you: {and some might say that} being crafty, I caught you with deception! 17 Or did I take advantage of you by means of those I sent you? 18 I gave instructions to Titus and sent the brother with him.
Did Titus take any advantage of you? Did we not walk in the same spirit? Did we not walk in the same steps? 19 Again, do you think that we are making an apology to you? In the sight of God, we speak in Christ.
All things, beloved, are to build you up.

Gospel Reading:
10 When he was alone, those who were around him together with the Twelve asked him about the parables.
11 Jesus told them, 'The mystery of the Kingdom of God is given to you, but to those who are outside, everything comes in parables, 12 so that 'seeing they may [indeed] see, and [yet] not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and [yet] not understand; otherwise they might repent and be forgiven.
'd 13 Jesus asked them, 'Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the [other] parables? 14 The farmer sows the word.
15 Some people are like the seed sowed by the edge of the road where the word

is sown.
As soon as they have heard, Satan comes and takes away the word which had been sown in them.
16 Likewise, those who are sown on the rocky places are those who receive the word with joy as soon as they hear it.
17 But they have no root in themselves and only last for a short while.
When oppression or persecution comes because of the word, they immediately stumble.
18 Others are those who are sown among the thorns.
These are people who have heard the word, 19 but the worries of this age, the deceit of wealth, and the desire to possess things enter in and choke the word.
Thus, it produces no fruit.
20 The seeds which were sown on the good ground are those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit.
Some multiply thirty times, some sixty, and some a hundred times!' 21Jesus said to them, 'Is a lamp brought in to be placed under a basket or under a bed? Is it not placed on a stand? 22 For there is nothing hidden that should not be revealed, and nothing was made secret that should not come to light.
23 Anyone who has ears for listening should listen!'

Day 05-Sep-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Seventy Holy Martyrs, headed by Urban, Theodore and Medimnus

Holy and Glorious Prophet Zacharias, Father of St John the Baptist

Much of his story is told in the first chapter of Luke's Gospel. The Synaxarion continues:

'After the birth of Christ, Zacharias plainly declared the virginity of Mary and showed her truly to be the Mother of God; for he appointed her a place in that part of the Temple reserved for the virgins and so brought upon himself the hatred of the priests and levites.

'When John was six months old, Zacharias hid him and his mother in a cave beyond the Jordan because King Herod, hearing of the birth in Bethlehem of the king of the Jews and fearing a rival of his own worldly power, sent soldiers to kill all the male children of Bethlehem. His enemies seized this opportunity to denounce Zacharias to Herod, who had him pursued and put to death within the precinct of the Temple, at the very place the Mother of God abode for a witnes to her virginity. As the Prophet's blood flowed within the sanctuary, it signified the withdrawing of the divine Presence. Priests came to take up his body and they buried him with his fathers. From that moment signs and prodigies occurred in the Temple, indicating that the rites of the Law would soon be abolished. No longer would the priests behold the angels of God, or have the grace of prophecy; no longer would they be able to deliver oracles or enlighten the people upon the dark places of holy Scripture, as they had been wont to do.'

Holy Hieromartyr Athanasius of Brest-Litovsk (1649)

"Saint Athanasius was born in the province of Minsk in 1596, the same year as the false Union of Brest-Litovsk was concluded between Rome and some Russian bishops. His father was a Lithuanian nobleman of modest means, but Athanasius acquired a breadth and depth of learning that were exceptional at that time. Besides modern and ancient languages and the writings of the holy Fathers, he was familiar with the works of Western philosophers and

theologians.

"In 1627, after spending several years as a private tutor, he became a monk at the Monastery of Khutyn near Orsha in Little Russia. This monastery was independent of the Polish occupying forces and, by tradition, deeply committed to the preservation of Orthodoxy, so that it was able to offer great encouragement to the Orthodox people in the face of Roman Catholic propaganda. Athanasius went on to follow his monastic path in other renowned monasteries, and was ordained priest. The Metropolitan of Kiev, Peter Moghila, gave him the task of restoring the Monastery of Kupyatitsk. In obedience to a divine revelation, Athanasius set out for Moscow, a long and dangerous journey through territory under Polish occupation, in order to ask for financial assistance for the restoration, and to acquaint the Tsar with the fate intended for the Orthodox Church in the lands to the south-west of Russia. He was successful in his quest and with the help of the Mother of God, the restoration works were begun. Two years later, Athanasius was appointed Abbot of the Monastery of St Symeon the Stylite in Brest-Litovsk. From then on, he was to be a resolute and tireless fighter against Roman proselytism, clothed in Orthodox rites and customs known as the Unia. For the next eight years, by prayer, preaching and through his writings, the Saint devoted all his strength to refuting the false Union, and to bringing back to the holy sheep-fold of Christ those who had strayed.

"The population of the occupied territories was brutally treated by the Polish soldiers and colonists, nor did the Jesuit missionaries, for their part, abstain from any measure that might serve to lead the peoples of Little Russia to accept their faith. In this situation, Saint Athanasius decided to petition the King of Poland, Vladislav IV, that the Orthodox be treated with more humanity. The King was moved by his request and issued a decree forbidding the abuses that had occurred, but his officials ignored it. The condition of the Orthodox in Warsaw was particularly bad. It was not unknown for the Poles and Uniates to set fire to Orthodox churches on feast days when they were full of the faithful, just as had happened in the time of the great Persecutions.

"Athanasius kept up the fight, aided and comforted by none but the Mother of God, and in 1643, following a new revelation, he again appealed for redress on behalf of the Orthodox to the Polish Council of State. He received a favourable hearing and the Orthodox were granted some legal protection. But certain Orthodox men of rank, fearing for their privileges, claimed that the Saint was mad and succeeded in having him deprived of his abbacy, deposed

from the priesthood and sent to Kiev to answer before a church court.

"The humble Athanasius was completely exonerated and restored to his position, but he did not have peace for long, since persecution of the Orthodox soon began again. He drew up a petition intended for the King of Poland, but was arrested and thrown into prison before he was able to complete it. He was released after three years' detention but, in 1648, a persecution broke out that was more terrible than ever before. So bloody was it that the people of Little Russia rose up and demanded the departure of the Polish-Lithuanian army and the restoration of Russian territory to the Tsar. The Polish authorities immediately arrested the rebel leaders and prominent Orthodox dignitaries. Saint Athanasius was imprisoned, and endured physical and mental torments of all kinds at the hands of his gaolers and of the Roman Catholic authorities, but he never ceased to cry, 'Anathema to the Union!' After being tortured with red-hot coals, he was flayed and burnt alive. As he was still not dead, his executioners shot him.

"They threw his decapitated corpse into a pit, where it was found some time later incorrupt. In the years that followed, the relics of the holy Martyr worked many miracles." (Synaxarion)

Holy Martyrs Abda the bishop, Hormizd and Sunin of Persia (4th c)

Saint Abda lived in Persia during the reign of the Emperor Theodosius II and of the Persian king Yazgerd I; as bishop of the Christians there, he labored tirelessly to care for his own flock and bring the pagans to Christ. One day, full of zeal, he entered the temple at which the king made sacrifice, overturned the sacred fire and set the temple on fire. The enraged king forbade the worship of the Christian God, ordered the destruction of all the churches and monasteries, and arrested all of the clergy. Abda was brought before the king and ordered to rebuild the pagan temple; when he refused, he was cruelly and lengthily tortured until he gave up his soul to God. This was the beginning of a thirty-year period of terrible persecution for Christians in Persia. Of the many who perished for Christ during this time, St Benjamin is commemorated on October 13, and Sts Hormizd and Sunin today.

Saint Hormizd was the son of a Persian governor who became a Christian in his youth. For this, his father condemned him to labor as a naked camel-herder in the desert. Some time later, the King sent Hormizd a linen tunic, promising to restore him to favor if he would return to the religion of the Persians. The Saint tore up the tunic and retured it to the king, for which he was executed.

Saint Sunin was a high Persian official who turned to Christ and was rewarded with a crown of martyrdom.

Day 05-Sep-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free
Readings of the day: 2 Corinthians 12:20-13:2; Mark 4:24-34
20 Still, I am afraid that somehow, when I arrive, I might find you as I would wish, and that I might be found by you not as you would wish.
I am afraid that somehow, there would be strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, whisperings, proud thoughts, riots, etc.
21 [Yes, I am afraid] that when I arrive, my God may again humiliate me before you, and I would mourn for those who have sinned before and not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality and lustfulness which they have committed.
13 This is the third time I am coming to you! 'At the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.
2 As I have said before and now repeat, as I did during my second visit; now that I am absent, I write to those who have sinned and to all the rest: if I come again, I will not spare;

Gospel Reading:
24 He also told them, 'Pay attention to what you hear! With whatever measure you measure, it will be measured to you, and more will be given to those who hear.
25 For whoever has will receive even more, but to the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.
The parable of the growing seed – The mustard seed 26 Jesus said, 'The Kingdom of God is as if a man would scatter seed on the ground,
27 and then go to sleep.
Night and day, whether he sleeps or rises, the seed springs up and grows, even if he does not know how.
28 For the earth bears fruit: first the blade comes, then the head, then the full grain in the head.
29 But when the fruit is ripe, at once the man pulls out his sickle, because the harvest has come.
30 Jesus said, 'What can we compare the Kingdom of God to? Or with what parable will we illustrate it?
31 It is like a grain of mustard seed sown in the ground! Even though it is smaller than all the seeds on earth, 32 when it is sown and grows up, it becomes greater than all garden plants! It puts out great branches and the birds of the sky can find shelter under its shade.
33 Using many parables like these, he spoke the word to the people, as much as

they were able to hear it.
34 He would not speak to them except in parables, but to his own disciples, he explained everything in private.

Day 06-Sep-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Commemoration of the Miracle of the Archangel Michael at Colossae (Chonae) (4th c.)

In Colossae in Phrygia there were a church and a holy spring dedicated to the Archangel Michael. Malicious pagans diverted the course of two rivers so that they would inundate the church. But the Archangel appeared, bringing with him an earthquake that shook the whole area and opened a fissure into which the waters plunged, sparing the church. The place was thereafter called "Chonae" Greek for "funnels" instead of Colossae.

Holy Prophet Zacharias and Righteous Elizabeth (1st c.), parents of St John the Forerunner.

The story of the holy parents of the Forerunner is told in the first chapters of Luke's Gospel. Several of the Fathers say that Zacharias is the one who, the Lord said, was slain between the temple and the altar (Matthew 23:35); because he continued to call the Mary the Mother of God a virgin even after she bore Christ; and because his son had escaped the slaughter of the innocents ordered by Herod. St Elizabeth had hidden him in a cave in the desert; he remained in the wilderness from that time until he began to preach by the Jordan.

St Maxim (Sandovich), martyr of Lemkos, Czechoslovakia (1914) (August 24 OC)

St Maxim was born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1888. At this time all Orthodox Churches had been captured and subjected to the "Unia," by which, though keeping the Orthodox liturgical rites, they were united to the Roman Catholic Church. Many of the Carpatho-Russian people were ignorant of the change and what it meant; others were unhappy with it but, in their subject condition, saw no alternative. Maxim's farmer parents, at great personal sacrifice, obtained an education for him that enabled him to study for the priesthood at the Basilian seminary in Krakow. Here he discerned the un-Orthodox nature of the "Greek Catholic" training there and traveled to Russia, where he became a novice at the Great Lavra of Pochaev and met Archbishop Anthony (Khrapovitsky), who encouraged him in his quest for Orthodoxy. (Archbishop Anthony, after the Russian Revolution, became the

first Metropolitan of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad). He entered seminary in Russia in 1905 and was ordained to the Priesthood in 1911.Metropolitan Anthony, knowing the hardships and persecutions that awaited any Orthodox priest in Austro-Hungary, offered to find Maxim a parish in Russia. But Maxim was already aware of the hunger for Orthodoxy among many of the Carpatho-Russian people; several people from his village had travelled to America and while there had attended Orthodox Churches and confessed to Orthodox priests. They begged him to return to his country and establish an Orthodox parish there.

When he returned to his native village of Zhdynia, the polish authorities, seeing him in the riassa, beard and uncut hair of an Orthodox priest, mocked him, saying "Look, Saint Nicholas has come to the Carpathians!" But the people of nearby Hrab sent a delegation asking him to set up an Orthodox parish in their village. This he did, setting up a house-church in the residence that the people gave him. Almost immediately, he and his people began to be harassed and persecuted, first at the instigation of "Greek Catholic" priests, then of the government. His rectory/church was closed, and he and several of his parishioners were repeatedly jailed, sometimes on trumped-up charges of sedition. (The Carpatho-Russian people were always suspected of pro-Russian political sympathies by the Austrian and Polish authorities).

Despite these persecutions, through Fr Maxim's labors a wave of desire for Orthodoxy spread through the region, with many Carpatho-Russians openly identifying themselves as Orthodox. The government issued orders to regional mayors to forbid those who had identified themselves as Orthodox to gather and, in 1913, appointed a special commissioner whose task was to force the people to return to Catholicism.

In 1914, war broke out between Russia and Austro-Hungary. Despite lack of any evidence that Fr Maxim had engaged in pro-Russian political activity — he once said "My only politics is the Gospel" — he was arrested and executed on September 6 by the Papal calendar, August 24 by the Church Calendar. He was denied any form of Church burial, and his father buried him with his own hands.

Following the First World War, Orthodoxy became legal in the new Polish Republic, and a monument was placed over Fr Maxim's grave in his home town of Zhdynia. In 1994, the Orthodox Church of Poland officially glorified St Maxim.

Day 06-Sep-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 2 Corinthians 13:3-13; Mark 4:35-41
3 seeing that you seek a proof that Christ speaks in me.
He is not weak toward you, but powerful in you.
4 He was crucified in weakness, but he lives through the power of God.
We too are weak in him, but we will live with him through the power of God {which is also} for you.
5 Test yourselves and see whether you are in the faith, yes, test your own selves.
Do you not know that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless, indeed, if you are disqualified.
6 But I hope that you will realize that we are not disqualified.
7 I pray to God that you do not commit anything evil, not that we may appear approved, but that you may do what is honorable, (even if we appear to be disapproved).
8 Indeed, we can do nothing against the truth, only for the truth, 9 and we rejoice when we are weak and you are strong! We also pray for this; that you would become perfect.
10 And so, I write these things while absent, so that I may not have to deal [with you] harshly when I arrive, according to the authority which the Lord gave me for building up, not for tearing down.
11 Finally, brethren, rejoice! Be perfected, be comforted, be of the same mind, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you.
12 Greet one another with a holy kiss!
13 A ll the saints greet you.
14 May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with all of you.
Amen.

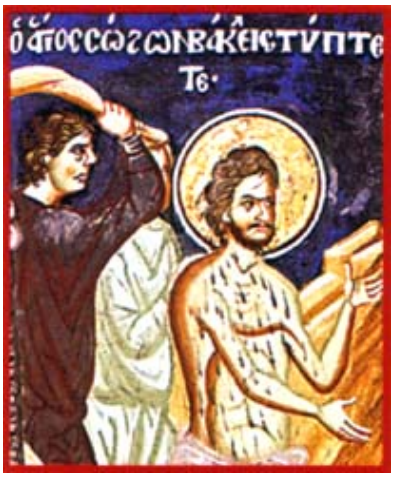
Gospel Reading:
35 That day, when evening came, Jesus said to them, 'Let us cross over to the other side.
36 Leaving the crowd behind, his disciples took him with them in the boat, just as he was; and there were also other small boats with him.
37 A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so much that the boat was already filling.

38 But Jesus was in the stern, asleep on the cushion.
They woke him up and told him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?'
39 Jesus awoke and rebuked the wind, saying to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' The wind ceased, and there was a great calm.
40 He then asked his disciples,c 'Why are you so afraid? How is it that you have no faith?' 41 They were greatly afraid and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'

Day 07-Sep-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Forefeast of the Nativity of the Theotokos
† Martyr Sozon of Cilicia (208/304)



He began life as a pagan shepherd in Lycaonia. Coming to faith in Christ, he was baptized and received the name Sozon ("Save"). Thereafter he took every opportunity to proclaim the Gospel to his countrymen and to urge them to give up their idols. Entering a temple of Artemis in Cilicia, he cut off its golden hand, broke it into pieces, and distributed the gold to the poor. When he learned that because of this some were being punished unjustly for theft, he gave himself up to the governor Maximian. He was beaten to death with rods, by some accounts in 288, by others in 304.

Holy Apostles Evodus and Onesiphorus of the Seventy

St Evodus (or Evodius) is mentioned by St Ignatios of Antioch. He was a disciple of the Apostle Peter and succeeded him as Bishop of Antioch. It is said that the name "Christians" for members of the Church was given by Evodus. He was martyred during a visit by the Emperor Vespasian to Antioch.

St Onesiphorus is mentioned by the Apostle Paul in his second epistle to St Timothy, where he calls Onesiphorus a friend and helper. He was a bishop in Colophon in Asia Minor, where he met martyrdom for Christ.

Holy Martyr Eupsychyius of Caesarea (2nd c.)

He was the son of a wealthy pagan senator in Caesarea of Cappadocia. When his father died, he gave his inheritance to the poor, proclaiming the Kingdom of God while he did so. For this he was arrested by Sapricius, Governor of Cappadocia, and put in prison. He persuaded his jailers to release him for awhile, and set about giving away the remainder of his worldly goods, first to his accusers and persecutors, then to the poor. When all his wealth was gone, he voluntarily returned to prison. He was viciously scourged several times, then beheaded. At his martyrdom, it is said that milk instead of blood flowed from his body.

Our Holy Father John, Archbishop of Novgorod (1185)

"He was first a married priest and then, from 1163, bishop in Novgorod, building seven churches during his lifetime. He had a vision of the holy Mother of God and a rare power over demons, making them obey him, and he once miraculously preserved Novgorod from an attack by seventy-two princes. He

suffered from diabolical temptations, but overcame them all by the power of the Cross and by prayer. Retiring to a monastery in old age, he received the Great Habit and entered peacefully into rest in the Lord on September 7th, 1185." (Prologue)

St Kassia (Kassiani) the Hymnographer (9th c.)

She was born in Constantinople to a noble family, and grew to be unusually beautiful and learned — so much so that she was chosen to participate in a ‘bride show’, at which the Emperor Theophilos was to choose a wife. Struck by Kassia’s beauty, the Emperor approached her and said ‘Through a woman came forth the baser things,’ referring to Eve’s transgression. Kassia responded, ‘Through a woman came forth the better things’, referring to the Incarnation of Christ through His Most Pure Mother. Stung by her reply, the Emperor rejected her and chose Theodora as his wife. Kassia entered monastic life and founded a women’s monastery in Constantinople, closely allied with the Stoudion Monastery. Serving as abbess of the monastery, she wrote many liturgical hymns, at least twenty of which are included in the services of the Church. Best-known (or at least most closely associated with her) is the *Hymn of Kassiani*, sung at Matins on Holy Wednesday. She reposed in peace.

Day 07-Sep-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Galatians 1:1-10, 20-24-2:5; Mark 5:1-20

1 Paul, an apostle (sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead), 2and all the brethren who are with me, to the Churches of Galatia: 3Grace to you and peace from God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, 4who gave himself for our sins, so that he might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father- 5 to whom be the glory unto ages of ages! Amen.

A different 'Good News' 6 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ in order to embrace a different 'Good News'- 7 and there is no other 'Good News!' Yet, there are some who disturb you and want to pervert the Good News of Christ.

8 Now, even if ourselves or an angel from heaven should preach to you any 'Good News' that is not what we preached to you, let such a one be accursed! 9 We have said it before and now I say it again: if anyone preaches to you any other 'Good News' than what you received, let such a one be accursed! 10 I am now seeking to please God or people? I am striving to please human beings? But if I was still trying to please men, then I would not be a servant of Christ!

Gospel Reading:

5 They arrived on the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes.

2 As soon as Jesus came out of the boat, a man with an unclean spirit met him out of the [nearby] tombs.

3 This man lived in the tombs and no one was able to bind him, not even with chains.

4 (He had often been chained hand and foot but had torn the chains apart and broken the footshackles in pieces).

Indeed, nobody had the strength to control him.

5 Night and day, he remained in the tombs and the mountains, howling and cutting himself with stones.

6 When this man saw Jesus from afar, he ran and expressed adoration toe him.

7 He cried out with a loud voice, 'What have I to do with you, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? By God's Name, do not torment me!' 8 (For Jesus had just said to him, 'Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!') 9 Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?' He answered, 'My name is Legion, for we are many!' 10 He implored Jesus not to expel them from the earth.

11 Now, there was a great herd of pigs feeding on the mountainside.
12 All the demons begged him, saying, 'Send us into the pigs, so that we may enter into them.
13 At once, Jesus gave them permission.
The unclean spirits came out and entered into the pigs.
The herd of about two thousand rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and they were drowned in the sea.
14 Those who fed them ran away and told the story in the [nearby] town and countryside.
The people then came to see what had taken place.
15 They came to Jesus and saw the man who had been possessed by demons sitting, clothed, and in his right mind.
This was the very man who had [been possessed by] the legion [of demons,] and they were afraid.
16 The eyewitnesses reported to them what had happened to the man who was possessed by demons and [also] to the pigs.
17 Then, they began to beg Jesus to leave their region.
18 As Jesus was entering into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged to be allowed to stay with him.
19 But Jesus did not allow him, saying to him, 'Go to your house, to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how he had mercy on you.
20 The man went off on his way, and began to proclaim in Decapolis how Jesus had done great things for him, and everyone was amazed.

Day 08-Sep-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

The Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos

The Holy Virgin Mary was born of aged parents, Joachim and Anna. Her father was of the lineage of David, and her mother of the lineage of Aaron. Thus, she was of royal birth by her father, and of priestly birth by her mother. In this, she foreshadowed Him Who would be born of her as King and High Priest. Her parents were quite old and had no children. Because of this they were ashamed before men and humble before God. In their humility they prayed to God with tears, to bring them joy in their old age by giving them a child, as He had once given joy to the aged Abraham and his wife Sarah by giving them Isaac. The Almighty and All-seeing God rewarded them with a joy that surpassed all their expectations and all their most beautiful dreams. For He gave them not just a daughter, but the Mother of God. He illumined them not only with temporal joy, but with eternal joy as well. God gave them just one daughter, and she would later give them just one grandson – but what a daughter and what a Grandson! Mary, Full of grace, Blessed among women, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the Altar of the Living God, the Table of the Heavenly Bread, the Ark of God's Holiness, the Tree of the Sweetest Fruit, the Glory of the race of man, the Praise of womanhood, the Fount of virginity and purity – this was the daughter given by God to Joachim and Anna. She was born in Nazareth, and at the age of three, was taken to the Temple in Jerusalem. In her young womanhood she returned again to Nazareth, and shortly thereafter heard the Annunciation of the Holy Archangel Gabriel concerning the birth of the Son of God, the Savior of the world, from her most-pure virgin body.

Source: St. Nikolai Velimirovic, The Prologue of Ohrid – Volume Two.

Apolytikion

Your birth, O Theotokos, brought joy to the whole world, for from you dawned the sun of righteousness, Christ our God. Freeing us from the curse, He gave

us His blessings. Abolishing death, He granted us eternal life.

Kontakion

In your holy birth, Immaculate One, Joachim and Anna were rid of the shame of childlessness; Adam and Eve of the corruption of death. And so your people, free of the guilt of their sins, celebrate crying: “The barren one gives birth to the Theotokos, who nourishes our life.

New Martyr Athanasius of Thessalonika (1774)

He was born to a distinguished and pious Christian family in Thessalonika. After acquiring an unusually good education he spent a few years in Constantinople, then returned to his native city. He spoke both Turkish and Arabic well, and often conversed with Muslims. Once, while speaking with an emir, Athanasius pronounced the Muslim confession of faith to illustrate a point. The emir, seeing an opportunity, immediately reported Athanasius to the Islamic judge, claiming that he had converted to Islam. The judge found no merit in the case and would have dismissed Athanasius; but the emir and other officials were insistent, and the judge pressured Athanasius to convert. When Athanasius answered that he knew no truth but that of Christ, he was thrown in prison. When he appeared before the judge several days later, he was still firm in his confession, and was sentenced to death. He was hanged outside the city in 1774, at the age of twenty-five.

Our Venerable Father Serapion of Pskov (1481)

He wss born in (what is now) Lithuania, but entered monastic life in the Pskov district. His spiritual father was St Euphrosynus (May 15), under whose care he lived for more than fifty-five years. He became known for his exceptional humility and asceticism. He tried never to be idle, giving any free moment to prayer and reading of Scripture. He emphasized the importance of the common prayer of the Church, saying that reciting the entire Twelve Psalm rule in one's cell was not worth one Kyrie Eleison chanted by the brethren assembled together in church. His knowledge of Lithuanian and Finnish allowed him to strengthen the faith among the peoples of those lands. When he died, at the age of ninety, his clothing was so threadbare that no one wanted it. Soon after his repose, a blind man recovered his sight at St Serapion's tomb, which has been the site of many miracles ever since.

A Homily on the Nativity of the Theotokos
Archimandrite Cleopa (Ilie)

Thy Nativity, O Virgin,
Hath proclaimed joy to the whole universe!
The Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God,

Hath shone from Thee, O Theotokos!
By annulling the curse,
He hath bestowed a blessing.
By destroying death, He hath granted us eternal Life.
Troparion of the Feast

Beloved faithful!
When I think of the great honor and glory with which the Most-Good and Most-Generous God has adorned in the heavens the Mother of God, when I think about the eternal doxology with which the heavenly powers praise Her, then, when I think about those services and prayers which all the children of the Church of Christ lift up to Her here on the earth, and of the laudatory words composed in Her honor by those holy and elect of God, the thought enjoins me, foolishly, to add today, to the bright feast of the Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos, this tiny droplet to the great sea of praises in Her honor. This is what I would like to say.

My beloved brothers in Christ, have you ever pondered why the holy and divine fathers who composed the Synaxarion and established the feasts of the Lord, adorning the course of the year of the Lord, began with the Nativity of the Theotokos and ended with Her Dormition? After all we, as you know, in the first month of the new Church year, on September 8, celebrate the Nativity of Most Holy Theotokos, and in the last month of the Church year, on August 15, we celebrate her Dormition.[1]

The mystical reason why the year begins and ends with feasts of the Theotokos is that the All-Merciful God was pleased to begin and finalize His plan for the salvation of mankind from servitude to the devil and the torments of hell by the intercession of the Mother of God.

Understand, dear brothers, that God opened His Divine plan for the salvation of the world through the Theotokos already at the beginning of the world, when He told Eve that her seed would crush the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15). For about Christ it was said "Seed of the Woman" as having been born not from the seed of a man. At the very beginning of the world the All-Good God already through the old Eve in this mysterious way pointed to the new, spiritual Eve, that is to the Mother of God, able to bear in the fullness of time the New Adam, Christ, Who by His Incarnation crushed the head of the serpent, and death, and sin, for as in Adam all die, so in Christ all are quickened (cf. 1 Cor. 15:22).

And understand, brothers, that in the plan of salvation for mankind, the Mother of God was already prefigured in Noah's dove. For as it bore to Noah the good news of the cessation of the flood, so the Mother of God—the chosen dove of God and the Holy Spirit—through bearing Christ brought to the world the great news of its

redemption from slavery to sin. The Mother of God was prefigured also by Jacob's ladder upon which ascended and descended the angels of God (Gen. 28:12), for the Mother of God was that ladder upon which God came down to us and upon which our nature ascended to the right hand of God (Canon of the Akathist to the Theotokos).

And again the Mother of God was foreshadowed by the Burning Bush, burning but yet not consumed by the flames of the Divine fire (Ex. 3:2), for She was the spiritual bush, receiving into Herself the fire of the Godhead and not being burnt by It. The Mother of God was also foreseen in Aaron's budding rod (Number 17:8), for she went up from her barren parents who dwelt in purity, conceived by the Holy Spirit and bore Christ (Lk. 1:35).

The Mother of God was prefigured by the seven-branched candlestick (Ex. 37:17-24), for She enlightened the world with the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. And again she was prefigured by the golden censer (Ex. 37:16, 40:26-27), for she brought to the world the fire of the Godhead.

Further, the Mother of God was prefigured by the tabernacle of the Ark of the testimony and the tablets of the old law (Ex. 40:20-22) because She is the sacred tabernacle and the animate ark, and the tablet of the law of grace.[2] The Mother of God was foreshadowed by the shut gate seen by the prophet Ezekiel, for through Her passed but God alone and She remained shut, not violating the fountain of Her virginity (Ezek. 44:2).
The Mother of God is the Most Holy Queen, splendidly arrayed, Who Her blessed forefather, the prophet and king David saw in the Holy Spirit standing at the right hand of the throne of God, for He Who rules by the thunder of heaven in Her settled and live (Ps. 44:10). The Mother of God was foreshadowed again in the light cloud upon which God descended to us.

The Mother of God is the holy mountain upon which God was pleased to settle (Is. 2:2). The Mother of God is the porphyric and radiant cloud in which was hidden the noetic Sun, Christ our God. The Mother of God was prefigured also in the Ark of the old law, before which the king and prophet David danced with joy (2 Kg. 6:2-5).

A mystery is hidden in the name Mary. It consists of five letters,[3] mystically representing the name of five great and renowned Old Testament women. So, the letter "M" points to Mariam, the sister of Moses and Aaron; the letter "a" points to Abigail, the wife of Nabal; the letter "r" points to Rachel, the wife of Jacob; the letter "i" points to Judith,[4] the holy widow; and the letter "a" to [H]Anna[h], the wife of Elkanah.

By this is implied that all those gifts and virtues with which were crowned all these

women were combined in the child of God Mary, incomparably surpassing them. For Mariam, the sister of Moses, shone with two gifts—virginity and prophecy, and in the Blessed Mary virginity and prophecy abide forever. Abigail humbly entered into marriage, and the Virgin Mary above all for Her humility is praised, for God hath regarded the low estate of His Handmaiden (Lk. 1:48).
Rachel was known for her beauty, and the Virgin Mary is the very beauty and splendor of heaven.
Judith is known for killing Holofernes in her wisdom (Judith 13:8), but the Virgin Mary was made the habitation of the Wisdom and Word of God and by His power slew the incorporeal Holofernes—the devil.
Hannah, being barren, is glorified for she became the mother of the great Samuel (1 Kg. 1:20), while the Most Holy Virgin Mary is much more glorious, for she not barrenly, but being a Virgin, became the Mother of the Great Emmanuel (cf. Is. 7:14).

But, my brethren, how is possible to compare between the gifts of the saints and righteous ones and She Who is the treasury of all of the gifts of the Holy Spirit? For, according to the testimony of St. Jerome, every saint received from God at least some share of the gifts, but the Most Holy Virgin Mary revealed Herself to be full of every endowment.

Today may the barren and childless be comforted by the hope that through their alms and good deeds, fasting and prayers they too will be found worthy of children from God.

Today may the young remain in abstinence and may they celebrate in purity and honor the Nativity of the Mother of God.

Today may virgins and children exult in joy, for into the world for us has come the Mother of virginity.

Today may the old and the sick rejoice, for the staff of old age and comfort of the ailing has appeared to the world.

Today may those fallen into grievous sins and despairing of their salvation be comforted by hope, for the restoration of the fallen and the hope of the hopeless has been born on earth.

Day 08-Sep-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Galatians 2:6-10; Mark 5:22-24, 35-6:1
6 As far as the recognized leaders are concerned (what they were {before} makes
no difference to me; God does not discriminate), I can say that those who were
respected added nothing to me.
7 Instead, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the Good News for the
uncircumcised, just as Peter [had been entrusted] with the Good News for those
who are circumcised 8 (since he who appointed Peter to the apostleship of the
circumcision also appointed me to the Gentiles); 9 and when they perceived the
grace that was given to me, James, Kephase and John who were considered as
pillars gave to Barnabas and myself the right hand of fellowship, [showing] that we
should go to the Gentiles, and they to those who are circumcised.
10 They only asked us to remember the poor- which is the very thing that I was
eager to do.
Gospel reading:

22 Behold, one of the rulers of the synagogue whose name was Jairus came
forward.
Seeing Jesus, he fell at his feet, 23 and profusely begged him, saying, 'My little
daughter is at the point of death! Please come and lay your hands on her, so that
she may be made healthy and live.
24 Jesus went with him, and a great multitude followed him, pressing upon him on
all sides.
35 While he was still speaking, people came from the house of the ruler of the
synagogue, saying, 'Your daughter is dead! Why bother the Teacher any longer?'
36 But when Jesus heard the message, he immediately said to the ruler of the
synagogue, 'Do not be afraid, only believe!' 37 He allowed no one to follow him,
except Peter, James, and John (the brother of James).
38 He arrived at the synagogue ruler's house, and saw a commotion with weeping
and great wailing.
39 When Jesus had entered in [the house], he said to them, 'Why do you make a
commotion and weep? The child is not dead, but asleep!' 40 At this, they laughed
at him.
But Jesus,a having put them all out, took the father of the child, her mother, and
those who were with him, and went into the room where the child was lying.
41 Taking the child by the hand, Jesus said to her, 'Talitha cumi!' which means,
'Little girl, I tell you, get up!' 42 Immediately, the girl (who was twelve years old)

rose up and began to walk.
At this, they were overcome with amazement.
43 He strictly ordered them that no one should know this and told them to give her something to eat.
6 Rejected in Nazareth Jesus left that place and came into his own country, and his disciples followed him.

Day 09-Sep-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Holy Ancestors of God Joachim and Anna

St Joachim was of the tribe of Judah and a descendant of King David. St Anna was of the tribe of Levi, the daughter of a priest named Matthan. Matthan's three daughters were Mary, Zoia and Anna. Mary became the mother of Salome the Myrrhbearer; Zoia bore Elizabeth, mother of St John the Baptist; and Anna married Joachim in Nazareth. Joachim and Anna, to their great sorrow, were barren for fifty years. They lived prayerfully and kept only a third of their income for themselves, giving a third to the poor and a third to the Temple. Once when they had come to Jerusalem to offer sacrifice at the Temple, Joachim was publicly scorned by the High Priest Issachar for his childlessness. Joachim and Anna, greatly grieved, prayed fervently that God would grant them the miracle that he had wrought for Abraham and Sarah, and give them a child in their old age. Once, as each was praying separately in a secluded place, angels appeared to each of them and revealed to them that they would be given a blessed daughter, `by whom all nations will be blessed, and through whom will come the salvation of the world.' They both rushed home to tell one another the joyous news, and embraced when they met. (This is the moment depicted in their icon.) Anna conceived and gave birth to the Most Holy Theotokos. Both reposed in peace, not long after they had sent her to live in the Temple.

Commemoration of the Third Ecumenical Council (431)

The Council, called by the Emperor Theodosius the Younger, met in Ephesus. The two hundred fathers gathered there condemned the teaching of Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople, who would not call the holy Virgin Mary Theotokos (God-bearer) but only Christotokos (Christ-bearer). The holy fathers of the Council clearly affirmed that the Virgin Mary is, and is to be called, Mother of God. They also confirmed the teaching of the first two Councils and decreed that the Nicene Creed may not be altered (as it later was by the Western church).

† Holy Martyr Severian of Sebaste (320)

He was a prominent citizen of Sebaste during the reign of Licinius. When the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (March 9) were in prison, he encouraged and comforted them. For this, and for his Christian example which had converted many pagans in the region, the Provincial Governor Lysias ordered his arrest. But before the soldiers could find him, he presented himself before the Governor and openly proclaimed his faith. For this he was subjected to many days of horrible tortures, during which he constantly exhorted the believers who followed him to stand firm in their confession of Christ. After astonishing endurance of his torments, he gave up his spirit to God.

At the Saint's burial, the husband of one of his servants was miraculously raised from the dead, living for another fifteen years. The Christians could not decide where to bury Severian, so they wove a crown of flowers and laid it on his body to await a sign from heaven. An eagle took up the crown and dropped it in a nearby forest. The Christians buried the Martyr where the crown fell; his tomb became a fount of miracles, and the man who had been raised from the dead tended it for the rest of his life.

Our Holy Father Ciaran of Clonmacnoise (549)

Born to the family of a cartwright in Ireland, he entered monastic life when he was very young at the Monastery of Clonard, where he became a disciple of St Finnian (December 12). He became one of the 'Twelve Apostles of Ireland', all of them disciples of St Finnian. Ciaran founded the great monastery of Clonmacnoise (pronounced clon-mac-neesh) on the Shannon River, which became one of Ireland's great monasteries. Once, during a great famine, He distributed all of the monastery's food to the people, entrusting his monks' survival, and his own, to providence. Saint Ciaran reposed in peace, aged only thirty-three, in 549.

Day 09-Sep-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 4:1-5; Matthew 23:1-12

4 1 And so, let everyone think of us as Christ's servants and stewards of God's mysteries.
2 Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful!3But as far as I am concerned, it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or according to human judgment.
Yes, I do not [even] judge my own self 4because I know nothing against myself.
Yet, I am not justified by this, but the one who judges me is the Lord.
5 Therefore, judge nothing before the time, [that is] until the Lord comes.
He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the motives of every heart.
Then, each person will receive due praise from God.

Gospel Reading:

23 Jesus then spoke to the crowds and to his disciples, 2 saying, 'The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses.
3 Therefore, whatever they tell you to observe, observe and do, but do not imitate their works; for they preach and [yet] do not act accordingly. 4 Indeed, they bind heavy burdens that are dreadful to bear and put them on people’s shoulders; but they themselves will not lift a finger to help them. 5Instead, they do all their works to be seen by men.
They make their phylacteries broad, they enlarge the fringes 6 and love the place of honor at feasts.
They love the best seats in the synagogues, 7 the greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called ‘Rabbi, by people. 8 But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for one is your teacher, the Christ, and all of you are brothers.
9 Call no man on the earth ‘your father,’ for one is your Father, he who is in heaven. 10 And do not be called ‘teacher,’for one is your teacher, the Christ. 11 Instead, the one who is the greatest among you shall be your servant.
12 Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

Day 10-Sep-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Saint Pulcheria the Empress
Saints Apollos, Lucius and Clement

Martyrs Menodora, Metrodora, and Nymphodora at Nicomedia (305-311)

They were three sisters, raised in the Christian faith in Bithynia. Together they withdrew from the world and lived together in virginity on a lonely mountain, devoting themselves to prayer, fasting and labor. Though they wished only to live unknown to the world, their wonderworking gifts were discovered, and many people began to come to them for healing of ailments. In this way word of them reached the governor Fronton, who had them arrested and brought before him. Struck by their beauty (which had only increased despite their fasting and hard labor), the governor tried to flatter them, promising that he would send them to the Emperor to be given in marriage to noblemen. When he saw that this had no effect, the governor threw the sisters into prison. First he had Menodora tortured to death, then brought her two sisters to view her mutilated body, commanding them to deny Christ or meet the same fate. When they refused, they were subjected to the same fate. Christians recovered and buried the bodies of the three holy martyrs.

Day 10-Sep-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Sunday before the Exaltation of the Cross
Galatians 6, 11-18; John 3, 13-17
Epistle Reading: St.
Paul's Letter to the Galatians 6:11-18 Brethren, see with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand.
It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that would compel you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.
For even those who receive circumcision do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may glory in your flesh.
But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.
For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.
Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God.
Henceforth let no man trouble me; for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.
The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren.
Amen.

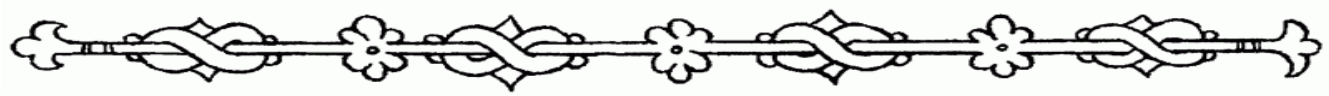
Gospel Reading: Sunday before the Exaltation of the Cross John 3, 13-17

The Lord said, 'No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven.
And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.
'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.
For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING
Today’s reading from St Paul’s epistle to the Galatians encourages us to focus the attention of our hearts on the Cross of Christ.
It means noticing that God far from being selfish, sacrifices himself for his

creatures.
When Jesus was thirty, he, the sinless God-Man, took upon himself all the sins of the world and washed them away by his baptism in the Jordan.
He was not washed by the water of Jordan: the water of Jordan was washed by his presence.
That is why often in church we bless water by plunging the Cross of Christ into it.
Let us think a little more about what Jesus did.
Instead of proclaiming, I am God, I am in charge of everything, I control everything, he took into himself everything that is wrong and painful, to the point of allowing the important people, the politicians and religious leaders, to humiliate him, make him suffer, and murder him by nailing him to a Cross.
God always fills our suffering world with his love.
God always takes the humblest place.
God never says, look at me, I am so important! At the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus went into the desert by the Dead Sea for forty days.
The devil tried to convince him that he should try and rule the whole world, but Christ rebuked the devil, saying that seeking power in this world would involve him in making a deal with Satan.
God alone must be worshipped, not power or money.
After that, Jesus spent three years healing the sick, comforting those rejected by others, teaching his disciples to be gentle and loving and to reject self-importance.
He taught us never to divide people into two categories, them and us, but instead to love even our enemies.
This is the challenge our Saviour has left us, calling us to see that his Cross forbids us to seek power try to control others.
Now let us look at today's Gospel (Joh. 3: 13-17). It reminds us that the light has come into the world (3: 19), that is, the revelation of God.
We know God when we are aware that the Cross shows God's nature: The Son of Man must be lifted up on the Cross (3: 14), because God's glory and joy is to take upon himself everything that is dark in the world and transform it into eternal life.
God so loved the world… that he did not send his Son to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him (3: 16-17). Our salvation is through faith in Christ, which means loving light and not darkness (3: 19). Light and love are the same thing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude.
It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.
It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
Love never ends (1 Cor. 13: 4-8). The Christian Gospel makes demands on us: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you (Luk. 6: 27). In baptism, we are plunged into the death of Christ.
A baptised Christian’s ego is dead, and says like Saint Paul, it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me (Gal. 2: 20). Receiving Communion, we become one with the Crucified Lord.
Communion gives us eternal life, but the price is high! In his first Epistle to the Corinthians Saint Paul reminds us that, all who eat and drink [Communion] without discerning the body [without realising that Communion implies dying with Christ] eat and drink judgement against themselves (1 Cor. 11: 29). Let us h



Day 11-Sep-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Martyr Ia of Persia

Our Holy Mother Theodora of Alexandria (490)

The Lord likened the Kingdom of Heaven to ten virgins, which is most evidently true of the ten holy women renowned in the Church for having led the ascetic life disguised in monasteries of men.+ Saint Theodora, who lived in Alexandria in the reign of the Emperor Zeno (474-91), is one of these women. She was married to a devout and respectable man called Paphnutius, but one day, led on by the devil, she committed adultery. No sooner had she sinned than she was so afflicted in conscience that she dared not return home, but felt a burning desire to do penance without delay. So, dressing as a man and calling herself Theodore, she asked to be admitted as a novice in a neighbouring monastery. The Abbot, supposing her to be a eunuch, and seeing how eager she was to set out on the path of repentance, straightway accepted her and clothed her in the angelic Habit.

For the space of two years, Saint Theodora showed an ardent zeal in the performance of every ascetic labour, doing the most menial tasks, and spending the nights in tears and fervent prayers to the Lord to forgive her sin, and to restore in her the grace of chastity. Her manner of life edified the brethren but greatly angered the devil who saw his prey escaping him. But this wolfish enemy of the good would not acknowledge himself defeated and he made use of some jealous monks to put it about that the youthful Theodore had committed fornication with a woman of a nearby village. They even brought his reputed child to the gate of the monastery. Theodore was silent before her accusers. She did not want to reveal her true identity and took what happened as a chastisement willed by God. She was expelled from the monastery for seven years, and took the child with her as if it were her own. She settled in a little hut not far off where, in extreme poverty, she endured summer heat and winter cold and manifold temptations of devils until, at the completion of her years of exclusion, she was allowed to rejoin the brethren.

On her return, far from resting from her labours, Theodora increased her vigils, fasts and prayers, showing an obedience and long-suffering even greater than before. She brought the child with her, teaching him how to acquire the holy evangelic virtues and unceasing prayer, so that he truly became her son according to the Spirit. When she had given him a final word of admonishment, she fell asleep in peace. At that moment the Abbot saw in a vision a woman clothed in shining raiment taken up into the air to join the choir of the Righteous and of the Saints. Then they all wept as they realized how far they had been mistaken in her and glorified God who had wrought so great a wonder. For living disguised among men and surpassing them in her ascetic labours, she was healed of carnal passion through struggling directly against fleshly temptations so that, while still clothed in the body, she attained the passionlessness and purity of the angels.

+Cf. Saints Euphrosyne (25 Sept.), Callisthena (4 Oct.), Pelagia (8 Oct.), Athanasia (9 Oct.), Anna-Euphemian (29 Oct.), Matrona (9 Nov.), Susanna-John (15 Dec.), Eugenia (24 Dec.), Apollinaria (4 Jan.), Maria-Marinus (12 Feb.). To these should be added Euphrosyne the Younger (8 Nov.), Domna and Anastasia the Patrician (not commemorated). ***Source: The Synaxarion: The Lives of the Saints of the Orthodox Church. Volume One, Introduction, September, October. Holy Convent of The Annunciation of Our Lady, Ormylia (Chalkidike), 1998.***

St Euphrosynos the Cook of Alexandria (9th c.)

His icon is found in countless Orthodox kitchens. A simple and holy man, when he entered monastic life in Alexandria he was judged unfit for any service more demanding than kitchen work. There he labored without complaint, looked down upon by most of the other monks. One night the abbot dreamed that he was in Paradise, and there met Euphrosynos, who gave him a branch that bore three fragrant apples. Awakening, the abbot found the same apples on his pillow. He hurried to find Euphrosynos and asked him, `Where were you last night, brother?' Euphrosynos only replied, `Where were you, Father?' The abbot gathered the monks and told them the wonderful story, by which they all realized the cook's holiness. But Euphrosynos, unwilling to endure the praise of men, fled the monastery for the desert.

St Paphnutius the Confessor (4th c.)

"A bishop of the Egyptian Thebaid, he suffered greatly for the Orthodox faith: heretics put out one of his eyes and broke his left leg. He took part in the First Ecumenical Council, refuting the Arian heresy with great power. The Emperor Constantine valued him greatly and often kissed him on the missing eye, lost for the truth of Orthodoxy. At the council, he stood in opposition to the western representatives, who proposed that secular priests be completely forbidden to marry. He was chaste throughout the whole of his life." (Prologue)

Canonization of St Xenia of St Petersburg (1978)

She is commemorated on January 24.

Day 11-Sep-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Galatians 2:11-16; Mark 5:24-34
11 However, when Kephas came to Antioch, I resisted him to his face, because he stood condemned.
12 Before some people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles.
But when they arrived, he drew back and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision! 13 Moreover, the rest of the Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, and even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy! 14 When I saw that their behavior was not consistent with the truth of the gospel,a I said to Peter before them all, 'If you, being a Jew, live as the Gentiles do, and not as the Jews do, why do you compel the Gentiles to live as the Jews do? Faith and the works of the law 15 As for us, being Jews by nature and not Gentile sinners, 16 yet knowing that no one is justified by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, we believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law.

Gospel Reading:
24 Jesus went with him, and a great multitude followed him, pressing upon him on all sides.
25 There was a certain woman who had an issue of blood for twelve years.
26 She had endured much at the hands of many physicians and spent all that she had.
Yet, she was not feeling better but worse.
27 Having heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his clothes.
28 For she thought, 'If I just touch his clothes, I will be made well!' 29 And immediately, the flow of her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction.
30 Jesus, perceiving in himself at once that power had gone out from him, turned around in the crowd and asked, 'Who touched my clothes?' 31 His disciples said to him, 'You see the multitude pressing against you, and you ask, 'Who touched me?"
32 Jesus looked around to see the woman who had done this.
33 But she, fearing and trembling, knowing what had been done to her, came forward and fell down before him, and told him all the truth.

34 Jesus said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well! Go in peace, and be cured of your disease.

Day 12-Sep-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Hieromartyr Coronatus, Bishop of Iconium
Holy Martyr Julian with Forty Companions
Venerable Daniel of Thasos
Holy Martyrs Macedonius, Tatianus and Theodulus

Leavetaking of the Nativity of the Theotokos
Hieromartyr Autonomus, bishop of Italy (313)

He fled from Italy to Bithynia during Diocletian's persecutions. In Bithynia he converted so many pagans to faith in Christ that those whose hearts remained hard rose up against him and, while he was celebrating the Divine Liturgy in the Church of the Archangel Michael, slew him at the altar, killing many other worshipers with him. Two hundred years after his death, he appeared to a soldier named John, who unearthed his relics and found them to be completely incorrupt.

Our Holy Father Athanasius the Elder of Vysotsk (early 15th c.), and his disciple Athanasius the Younger (1395)

He was reared in piety by his father, a priest in Novgorod. One day, hearing the words of the Gospel, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me, he renounced the world and entered the Monastery of St Sergius of Radonezh. He became St Sergius' disciple and, after a few years, became known for his virtue and his knowledge of Scripture. In 1374, with the blessing of his spiritual father, he founded the Monastery of Vysotsk, becoming its first abbot. After heading the monastery for fourteen years, he traveled to Kiev and then, in 1401, to the Monastery of the Stoudion in Constantinople. There he devoted himself to translating books from Greek to Slavonic, sending his translations back to his monastery in Russia. It was he who translated the Jerusalem Typikon and several collections of the writings of the Fathers of the Church, immeasurably enriching the life of the Church in Russia. He reposed in peace in Constantinople.

His disciple Athanasius the Younger was made Abbot of Vysotsk on the elder's departure for Constantinople, and served as Abbot for eight years, reposing in peace in 1395. He was called 'perfect in fasting, strong in self-restraint, zealous in prayer, patient in privations and tribulations.' The Synaxarion says that "He taught his monks to keep careful watch on every movement of the heart so as to drive away every thought displeasing to God."

Day 12-Sep-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Galatians 2:21-3:7; Mark 6:1-7

21 I do not nullify the grace of God! For if righteousness is through the law, then Christ died for nothing!' 3 Christ was openly presented to you as crucified- who then bewitched you not to obey the truth? 2 I just want to hear this from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law or by believing what you heard? 3 Are you that senseless that having begun in the Spirit, you now end in the flesh? 4 Did you suffer so many things in vain, if it is indeed in vain?

5 He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, does he do it by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith? 6 Even as Abraham 'believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness,' 7 know, therefore, that those who are of faith are likewise Abraham's children.

Gospel Reading:

6 Rejected in Nazareth Jesus left that place and came into his own country, and his disciples followed him.

2 When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue.

Hearing him, many were astonished, saying, 'Where did this man get these things?' and, 'What is the wisdom that is given to this man, that such powerful works come about by his hands?

3 Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary,c and brother of James, Joses, Judah, and Simon? Are not his sisters here with us?' And they rejected him.

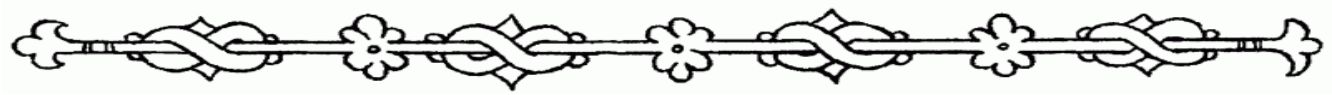
4 Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country, and among his own relatives, and in his own house.

5 He could not perform any miracles there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them.

6 He was astonished because of their unbelief.

The sending of the Twelve He went around the villages, teaching.

7 Calling to himself the Twelve, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over the unclean spirits.



Day 13-Sep-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Forefeast of the Exaltation of the Cross
Commemoration of the Founding of the Church of the Resurrection (Holy Sepulchre) at Jerusalem (335)

The Church is located on Golgotha, where our Lord was crucified and buried. The true Cross and the place of the Resurrection were covered over by those hostile to Christ and His Apostles, and in the reign of Hadrian a temple to Aphrodite was built over the holy sites. St Helena, mother of Constantine the Great, personally commanded and oversaw the excavations that restored the site and recovered the Cross itself. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre was begun at the Empress Helena's command, but she reposed before it could be completed. The Church was completed by Constantine and consecrated on this date in 335. Makarios archbishop of Jerusalem, presided at the consecration and also exalted the precious Cross (September 14). It is at this church that the miracle of the Holy Fire occurs every Pascha.

Holy Hieromartyr Cornelius the Centurion (1st c.)

This is the Cornelius who received St Peter into his household in Caesarea (Acts ch.10). He was then instructed in the Faith and baptised by St Peter, though he had been a pagan and a Gentile: a great turning point in the growth of the Church, for before this time many (including St Peter) had believed that the Church was meant only for the Jews. Tradition holds that St Cornelius later became a bishop and died a martyr.

Holy Great Martyr Ketevan, Queen of Georgia (1624)

In the seventeenth century, the Kingdom of Georgia was cruelly pressed by the Ottoman Empire on one side and Persia, under Shah Abbas the Great, on the other. King Theimuraz was taken captive by the Persians during an invasion and held captive in the fortress of Shiraz until, after many tortures, he was strangled.

The King's mother, Queen Ketevan, travelled to the Persian court at Shiraz along with her grandsons Levan and Alexander, to plead with the Shah to spare the Kingdom. The Shah agreed, but the three were kept as hostages,

where all were cruelly tortured.

Queen Ketevan endured ten years of captivity, throughout which the Shah attempted to convert her to Islam, first by persuasion and threats, then by torture. The Queen refused every effort to drive her into apostasy, and before each new torture would make the sign of the Cross and say 'In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.' At the end a brazier of burning coals was fixed to her head and, in the midst of her extreme torment, she was strangled with a bow-string on September 13 1624. After her glorious martyrdom a divine light surrounded her tomb.

Day 13-Sep-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Galatians 3:15-22; Mark 6:7-13
15 Brethren, even speaking of a human example; when a person's will has been confirmed, it cannot be cancelled or altered (even though it is only a human contract).
16 Now, the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed.
[Notice that] he does not say, 'to seeds,' as if there were many, but as of one, 'to your seed,'f which is Christ.
17 What I am saying is this: the law, which came four hundred thirty years after the covenant previously confirmed by God in Christ, does not cancel it to make the promise of no effect.
18 If the inheritance comes from the law, it is no longer from the promise; but in fact, God granted it to Abraham by way of a promise.
19 What then is the law about? It was added because of transgressions, until the seed to whom the promise had been made should come, and it was established through the angels, by the hand of a mediator.
20 Now, there is no mediator when there is only one party, and God is one.
21 Therefore, is the law against God's [own] promises? Certainly not! If a law had been given which could make alive, then certainly, righteousness would have been from the law.
22 But in fact, the Scriptures declared all things to be captive under sin, so that the promise might be given to those who believe, that is by faith in Jesus Christ.

Gospel Reading:
7 Calling to himself the Twelve, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over the unclean spirits.
8 He told them to take nothing for their journey, except for a staff: no bread, no wallet, no money in their purse.
9 He also told them to wear sandals and not put on two tunics.
10 He said to them, 'Wherever you enter into a house, stay there until you depart from the area.
11 If any place does not welcome you and if people refuse to listen to you, as you walk away, shake off the dust under your feet as a testimony against them.
Amen, I can tell you that in the day of judgment, things will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for that city!' 12 They went out and preached that people should repent.

13 They also cast out many demons and anointed with oil many people who were sick and healed them.

Day 14-Sep-2023 Thursday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Commemoration of the Sixth Ecumenical Council
† The Universal Exaltation of the Precious and Life-giving Cross

Epistle Reading: St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians 1:18-24
Brethren, the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart.' Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Gospel Reading: John 19:6-11, 13-20, 25-28, 30

At that time, when the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, 'Crucify him, crucify him!' Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no crime in him.' The Jews answered him, 'We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he has made himself the Son of God.'
When Pilate heard these words, he was the more afraid; he entered the praetorium again and said to Jesus, 'Where are you from?' But Jesus gave no answer. Pilate therefore said to him, 'You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?' Jesus answered him, 'You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore he who delivered me to you has the greater sin.' When Pilate heard

these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called the Pavement, and in Hebrew, Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, 'Behold your King!' They cried out, 'Away with him, away with him, crucify him!' Pilate said to them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but Caesar.' Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called the place of a skull, which is called in Hebrew Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. Pilate also wrote a title and put it on the cross; it read, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.' Many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek.
But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold your son!' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. Then when Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, 'It is finished"; and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

> "Saint Helen, the mother of Saint Constantine the Great, when she was already advanced in years, undertook, in her great piety, the hardships of a journey to Jerusalem in search of the Cross, about the year 325. A temple to Aphrodite had been raised up by the Emperor Hadrian upon Golgotha, to defile and cover with oblivion the place where the saving Passion had been suffered. The venerable Helen had the statue of Aphrodite destroyed, and the earth removed, revealing the Tomb of our Lord, and three crosses. Of these, it was believed that one must be that of our Lord, the other two of the thieves crucified with Him; but Saint Helen was at a loss which one might be the Wood of our salvation. At the inspiration of Saint Macarius, Archbishop of Jerusalem, a lady of Jerusalem, who was already at the point of death from a certain disease, was brought to touch the crosses, and as soon as she came near to the Cross of our Lord, she was made perfectly whole. Consequently, the precious Cross was lifed on high by Archbishop Macarius of Jerusalem; as he stood on the ambo, and when the people beheld it, they cried out, "Lord, have mercy." It should be noted that after its discovery, a portion of the venerable Cross was taken to Constantinople as a blessing. The rest was left in Jerusalem in the magnificent church built by Saint Helen, until the year 614. At that time, the Persians plundered Palestine and took the Cross to their own country (See Jan. 22, Saint Anastasius the Persian). Later, in the year 628, Emperor Heraclius set out on a military campaign, retrieved the Cross, and after bringing it to Constantinople, himself escorted it back to Jerusalem, where he restored it to its place." (Great Horologion) A fast is kept today, whatever the day of the week.

Apolytikion

Lord, save Your people and bless Your inheritance, granting our rulers to prevail over adversaries, and protecting Your commonwealth by Your Cross.

Kontakion

Lifted up on the Cross by Your free will, Christ God, grant mercies to the new commonwealth that bears Your name. Gladden our faithful rulers by Your power, giving them victories over their adversaries. May Your alliance be for them a weapon for peace, an invincible standard.

Repose of St John Chrysostom (407)

St Placilla the Empress (385 or 386)

She was the wife of the Emperor Theodosius the Great, and the mother of two Emperors, Arcadius and Honorius. Despite her lofty station, she devoted herself to visiting the poor and to caring personally for the sick. She often worked in the kitchens of various hospices in Constantinople, taking on tasks unexpected of anyone of patrician rank, let alone the Empress herself. To fulfil these missions, she often traveled unescorted through the poorest parts of the City. When others tried to caution or dissuade her, she answered that this was her way of giving thanks for all that God had given her. "Throughout her life, Saint Placilla served God in chastity, meekness, charity and prayer, and departed in peace to eternal life in 386 (or 385), having brought to those who encountered her a pledge of the Resurrection and of endless joy." (Synaxarion)

Holy New Martyr Macarius of Thessalonica (1527)

"A disciple of Patriarch Niphon at the time that the latter was labouring in the asceticism of silence at Vatopedi, Macarius longed for martyrdom for the sake of Christ, and begged St Niphon's blessing to seek it. The discerning Patriarch, perceiving that this was God's will, blessed him for the way of martyrdom. Macarius went to Salonica and, in the midst of a crowd of Turks, began to speak of Christ as the one, true God. The Turks seized him and threw him into prison. When he was brought to trial, Macarius cried out to the Turks: 'Oh, that you would come to know the truth and be baptised in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit!' The Turks beheaded him in 1527. At that moment, Niphon saw this in his spirit at Vatopedi, and told a monk of Macarius's death by martyrdom, saying: 'Know, my child, that your brother Macarius has today died a martyr, and is borne to heaven, triumphing and rejoicing in the Lord. May we be worthy of blessing by his prayers!' (From the Athonite Patrology)." (Prologue)

Sermon on the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy and Life-giving Cross

On September 14, the whole of the Orthodox world rejoices as we celebrate the Exaltation of the Holy Cross: “Behold, through the cross joy has come to the world!” (Paschal prayer)

Three historical events contributed to the establishment of this holiday:
1st. The discovery of the wood of the Holy Cross, in the year 326, by Saint Helen, mother of the Emperor Constantine the Great. When the Cross of the Lord was discovered near Golgotha and was miraculously identified as the true Cross of Christ, St. Helen worshiped it with tears and handed it over to Bishop Makarios of Jerusalem.

2nd. Saint Helen had laid the foundations of the Church of the Resurrection of the Lord over the site of the Holy Sepulchre, which was completed in the year 335, followed by its Inauguration. The next day, September 14 of the same year, the Elevation of the Holy Cross was held in the middle of the Church, with every ecclesiastical order, and everyone rushed to worship the Holy Cross with deep emotion and reverence.

3rd. After three centuries, the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross was repeated once again. This is because, when the Persians invaded and conquered Jerusalem in 614, they snatched the Holy Cross from the Church of the Resurrection and held it for 14 years. In 628, the pious Emperor of Byzantium, Heraclius, defeated the Persians and returned the Holy Cross to Jerusalem. On September 14, 628, Emperor Heraclius, barefooted and in plain clothes, ascended to the Church of the Resurrection, in a procession, carrying the Holy Cross on his shoulders and handed it over to the Patriarch of Jerusalem Zacharias. The Patriarch received the Cross with deep emotion and raised it in the middle of the Church triumphantly, while all the faithful started singing together the hymn: “Save the Lord Your people and bless Your inheritance …”.

Since then, it has been established to officially celebrate the Exaltation of the Holy Cross throughout the Church, in both East and West.
The Holy Fathers of the Church, from the 4th century onwards, in their wonderful Sermons on the Holy Cross, highlight with many images and expressions the meaning of the Cross as well as the importance it bears in the life of the Church and of every believer.

Yet, we must clarify from the very beginning that the Cross does not carry any magical properties by itself. It derives all its value from the God-man Jesus Christ, who voluntarily was nailed to the Cross, upon which He shed His Holy Blood and sanctified it, thus making it a bearer of His Grace. That is why the God-inspired Fathers of the Church say: “When I honor the Cross, I admittedly honor Him, who was crucified on it. Moreover, when I honor the crucified Lord, I undeniably venerate the Cross. Let us, therefore, give due veneration to the Cross of Christ. Let us bend before Him our knees· (and even) much before that, (let us) bend the ubending heart”. (1)

We, therefore, celebrate the great feast of the Holy Cross, and the whole congregation of the Church is enlightened and filled with rays of divine joy. The Cross is elevated, and together it elevates the whole of humanity, which had fallen down due to its sins. We are no more afraid of the fiery arrows of the devil, because the Holy Cross protects us. The Cross is a source of millions of blessings for us. The Cross is the hope of Christians, the savior of the desperate, a haven for those in difficult circumstances, a doctor for the sick; it removes sinful passions and sustains the Faith. (2)

The Cross is a ladder that ascends to Heaven. The Cross protects us from temptations, saves us from dangers, comforts us in sorrows, helps us in every need. The Cross protects widows and orphans. He who gazes at the Cross, is filled with courage and drives away cowardice. (3)

My beloved Brothers and Sisters, since the blood-stained Cross of the Lord provides us with all these and so many other blessings, let us be closely connected with it and let us often invoke its grace and power, in every need of ours.

Let us make the sign of the cross when we get up in the morning, thanking the Lord who blessed us to see the light of a new day. Let us begin and end our work with the sign of the cross. For every mercy we receive from God, let us thank Him by making our cross. Moreover, in every need of ours let us invoke the help and protection of our Almighty and Most Merciful Lord by making the sign of the cross; and let us rest assured that we, like many others, will see miracles in our lives.

(1) Nicetas the Paphlagonian, PG 105, 28-29.
(2) John Chrysostom, Homily on the Cross, and Homily B'. Migne P.G. 49 p.p. 407-418.
(3) St. Andrew of Crete, Homily A' On the Elevation of the Holy and Life-giving Cross, PG 97, 1017-36.

Day 14-Sep-2023 Thursday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: None
Today the Apostle and Gospel of the feast are used

Day 15-Sep-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Philotheus the Righteous
Saint Bessarion, Archbishop of Larissa
Holy New Martyr John of Crete
Saint Joseph, Bishop of Alaverdi

Great Martyr Nicetas the Goth (372)

He was a Goth of noble birth among his people, a disciple of Bishop Theophilus of the Goths, who took part in the First Ecumenical Council. When he confronted Athanaric, the pagan ruler of the Goths, for his persecution of Christians and for his unbelief, Nicetas was cruelly tortured and finally burned to death. Though he died in the flames, his body was brought forth unharmed. His relics were taken by his friend Marianus to Mopsuestia in Cilicia, where a church dedicated to the Saint was built.

Holy Martyr Porphyrius (361).

"An actor, he first mocked at Christians before Julian the Apostate. On one occasion, when he was mimicking the Christian mystery of Baptism, he was dipped into the water, pronouncing the words: 'In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.' When he emerged from the water, he cried out: 'Now I am a Christian!' Everyone thought that this was in jest, as always, but he held firm to it, stopped mocking Christians and finally suffered for Christ. He was beheaded in 361, and entered into the Kingdom of Christ." (Prologue)

We rightly condemn worship that is purely external; but the life of St Porphyrius reminds us in a striking way that the 'externals' of the Faith have a power that can work to convert the heart of man. St Porphyrius used the words of Holy Baptism not only carelessly but mockingly, yet by God's grace he emerged from the waters truly renewed into Christ.

Day 15-Sep-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Galatians 4:8-21; Mark 6:45-53
8 In the past, as you did not know God, you were in bondage to those who by
nature are not gods.
9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather come to be known by God,
why do you return to the weak and miserable primordial forces whose slaves you
want to be all over again? 10 You observe days, months, seasons, and years.
11 I am afraid concerning you, that I may have wasted my labor for you.
12 I beg you, brethren, become as I am, for I also have become as you are.
You have never treated me wrongly, 13 but you know that it was an illness that first
gave me an opportunity to preach the Good News to you.
14 Even though my condition was a trial for you, you did not despise nor reject me;
instead, you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus! 15 What has
happened to the blessing you enjoyed? Indeed, I bear witness to you that, if
possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me! 16 And
now, have I become your enemy by telling you the truth? 17 Those people pursue
you, but not for good.
No, they desire to cut you off from us, so that you might eagerly seek after them.
18 But it is always good to be zealous in a good cause, not only when I am present
with you! 19 My little children, I am again in labor over you, until Christ is formed in
you! 20 I wish that I could be with you in person now, to change my tone, because
I am confused about you.
21 Tell me, since you desire to be under the law, {why} do you not listen to the
law?
Gospel reading:

45 At once, Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the
other side, to Bethsaida, while he himself sent the crowd away.
46 After he had taken leave of them, he went up the mountain to pray.
47 When evening came, the boat was in the middle of the sea while Jesus was
alone on the shore.
48 Seeing the disciples hard pressed in their rowing as the wind was against them,
he came to them when it was about the fourth watch of the night.
Jesus was walking on the sea and would have passed by them, 49 but when they
saw him walking on the sea, they thought that it was a ghost and cried out.
50 They all saw him and were troubled, but immediately, Jesus spoke with them
and said, 'Rejoice! It is I!d Do not be afraid!' 51 He got into the boat with them and

the wind ceased.
They were utterly astonished and marveled greatly 52 because they had not understood about the [miracle of the] loaves, but their hearts were hardened.
53 After crossing over, they landed at Gennesaret and moored the boat to the shore.

Day 16-Sep-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Holy Martyr Ludmilla
Saint Cyprian, Metropolitan of Kiev

† Great-Martyr Euphemia the All-praised, of Chalcedon (304)

She was born in Chalcedon to noble Christian parents. When Priscus, the locul Proconsul, celebrated a public sacrifice to Ares, forty-nine Christians including Euphemia hid themselves to avoid idolatry. Their absence was noticed, and they were found and brought before Priscus. After torturing all of them for eleven days, on the twelfth day he singled out Euphemia because of her beauty and began to flatter her, hoping in this way to draw her away from the Faith. When his efforts proved useless, he ordered her to be more savagely tortured than any of her fellow believers. She was miraculously preserved intact through many tortures, finally giving her soul into God's hands when she was thrown to wild beasts. Her devout parents retrieved and buried her body. Her relics are preserved in the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

The miracle wrought by her holy relics at the Council of Chalcedon is commemorated on July 11.

Holy Hieromartyr Cyprian of Carthage (258)

He was born to wealthy and noble parents in Carthage (north Africa), and became a prominent lawyer in that city. Around the year 246 he embraced the Christian faith and was baptized by the priest Caecilianus. Immediately he gave all his goods to the poor and retired to a quiet place in the country to devote himself to prayer and study of Christian writings. In 248 or 249 he was elected Bishop of Carthage by the insistence of the people, though some priests opposed the consecration of such a new Christian.

Soon after his election, the Emperor Decius began a terrible persecution of Christians, during which Cyprian, in hiding, upheld his flock by letters. During this time many Christians gave in to fear of death and either sacrificed to the idols or signed statements that they had done so. When the persecution ended, the problem arose of how to treat the apostates who wished to be received back into the Church. Rigorist groups such as the Novatians and

Montanists held that these lapsi had removed themselves from all hope of salvation and could never re-enter the Church. Cyprian rejected this view (as well as the position of some who would immediately reconcile the apostates); he established the position, still standard in the Church, that apostates could be restored after confession and long penance. His position led to a schism in the Church at Carthage when Cyprian's opponents set up Maximus the Montanist as a rival Bishop. The schism was only ended by a plague that swept the Empire and the city of Carthage in 253-254, together with a renewed persecution of Christians. Saint Cyprian's tireless care for the suffering during this time won most of the schismatics back to his side. When peace returned, Cyprian called a series of Councils in Carthage to resolve the conflicts that had troubled the Church. He upheld the African (and Eastern) churches' practice of reconciling heretics to the Church by Baptism rather than by laying on of hands, as was done in Rome; though Cyprian did not seek to impose this practice on other churches, Rome was not so tolerant and broke with the African church until the death of Pope Stephen.

In 256, yet another persecution broke out under the Emperor Valerian. Cyprian was arrested and brought before the Proconsul of the region. He refused to defend himself, and when told that he was to be executed, said only Deo Gratias!(Thanks be to God!). At his execution the holy bishop ordered that twenty-five gold pieces be given to the executioner, and put on the blindfold with his own hands.

Note: St Cyprian is missing on this date from traditional martyrologies because he was once confused with St Cyprian of Antioch (October 2). Today is the date of his martyrdom and the date of his commemoration on the Latin calendar.

St Ninian, Enlightener of Scotland (432)

One of the great missionaries and early Saints of the British Isles, he was born in Britain around the year 360. Though Britain was still mostly pagan, Ninian was born of Christian parents. He traveled to Rome as a young man, and spent several years there engaged in study and ascetic struggle. He was ordained in Rome and sent back as a missionary to Britain around the year 400. On the way he probably met St Martin of Tours: many of the churches he

founded, including his cathedral in Whithorn, were named in honor of St Martin. He established several monasteries, ministered to his Christian Briton countrymen and converted many more Britons to the Faith. He also converted many of the fierce Picts, inhabitants of today's Scotland, to faith in Christ. He reposed in peace in Whithorn in 432.

Our Holy Father Dorotheos the Solitary of Egypt (4th c.)

He was one of the great company of Egyptian desert fathers of the fourth century. He lived alone in a cell in the Thebaid for sixty years, devoting himself to prayer, asceticism and renowned love of labor. He spent his days building cells for new monks, his nights making plaited mats, all the while immersed in prayer and psalmody.

Day 16-Sep-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 4:17-5:5; Matthew 24:1-13

17 For this reason, I have sent Timothy to you, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord.
He will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, even as I teach everywhere in every Church.
18 Now, some of you, thinking that I am not coming to you, have become arrogant.
19 Still, I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills! Then I will find out not so much what these arrogant people say, but what power they have.
20 Truly, the Kingdom of God is not in speech, but in power.
c 21What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and with a spirit of gentleness? 5 A case of sexual immorality It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and a kind as does not even occur among the Gentiles, [namely] that someone has his father's wife! 2 And you are arrogant! Should you not rather have mourned, so that whoever has done this would have been removed from among you? 3For I most certainly, as being absent in body but present in spirit, have already, as though I were present, judged the man who has done this thing! 4In the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, and with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, 5 you are to hand over such a person to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that the spirit may be delivered in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Gospel Reading:

24 Jesus went out from the temple and was going on his way.
His disciples came to him and showed him the buildings of the temple.
2 But he told them, 'You see all of these things, do you not? Amen, I tell you that not one stone will be left standing on another; all will be thrown down.
3 As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him in private, saying, 'Tell us, when will these things be? What is the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?' 4 Jesus answered them, 'Be careful not to be led astray! 5For many will come in my Name, saying: 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many people astray.
6 You will hear of wars and rumors of wars.
Do not be troubled; all of this must take place, but the end is not yet.
7 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there will be

famines, plagues, and earthquakes in various places.
8 But all these things are [only] the beginning of the birth pains.
9 Then, they will deliver you up to oppression and they will kill you.
You will be hated by all the nations for my Name's sake.
10 Many will stumble and will betray and hate each other.
11 Many false prophets will arise and they will lead many astray.
12 Because wickedness will be multiplied, the love of many will grow cold.
13 But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

Day 17-Sep-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Holy Martyr Agathoclea
Holy 156 Martyrs of Egypt
Holy Martyr Theodota
Martyrs Sophia and her three daughters Faith, Hope and Love, at Rome (137)

Sophia was a widow in Rome in the time of the Emperor Hadrian, and raised her three daughters in the Faith. When the four of them were brought before the persecutors, Faith was twelve years old, Hope was ten, and Love was nine. Ordered to make sacrifice to the goddess Artemis, all of them humbly refused. All three daughters were tortured, then executed, before their mother's eyes. Sophia buried their bodies and mourned at their grave for three days and nights, then fell asleep in peace. For her steadfastness and solidarity with her daughters' sufferings she is counted as a martyr along with them. Sophia means "wisdom" in Greek; the three daughters' names in Greek are Pistis, Elpis, and Agape; in Russian, Vera, Nadezhda, and Lyubov. They are represented on many icons.

Our Holy Father Lambert, Bishop of Maastricht (705)

He was born to a noble family in Maastricht (in modern-day Netherlands). When his spiritual father Bishop Theodard was killed in 671, St Lambert was elected Bishop of Maastricht despite his youth. He was loved by his flock for his holiness, ascetic labors and almsgiving, but was driven from his see in 675 after his patron King Childeric II was assasinated. He withdrew to the Monastery of Stavelot where he lived for seven years as one of the brethren, claiming no privileges despite his office. Once, getting up to pray during the night, he accidentally disturbed the monastic silence. The Abbot called out for whoever was responsible to do penance by standing barefoot in the snow before a cross outside the monastery church. In the morning the Abbot was dismayed to see the Bishop standing barefoot, covered with snow, before the cross, his face shining. The Abbot sought to apologize, but Lambert replied

that he was honored to serve God like the Apostles, in cold and nakedness.

When King Pepin of Heristal took power in 681, he restored Lambert to his see, despite the Saint's desire to remain in obscurity. The holy bishop renewed his pastoral labors with vigor, visiting the most distant parishes and preaching the Gospel to the pagans who still inhabited the area, despite danger and threats. But when King Pepin put away his wife and replaced her with his concubine Alpais, St Lambert was the only Bishop who dared to rebuke him. For this he incurred the wrath of Alpais, who ordered his death. His assassins carried out their evil commission, even though they found a cross shining above the humble dwelling where he was staying.

Saint Lambert is one of the best-loved Saints of the Netherlands and Belgium, where many parish churches are dedicated to him. His relics are now in the Belgian city of Liège.

Day 17-Sep-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Gospel Reading: Sunday of the Holy Cross
"Galatians 2:16-20 Mark 8:34-38; 9:1"
Epistle Reading: St.
Paul's Letter to the Galatians 2:16-20 Brethren, knowing that a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no one be justified.
But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we ourselves were found to be sinners, is Christ then an agent of sin? Certainly not! But if I build up again those things which I tore down, then I prove myself a transgressor.
For I through the law died to the law, that I might live to God.
I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Gospel Reading: Mark 8:34-38; 9:1

The Lord said: 'If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.
For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.
For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? For what can a man give in return for his life? For whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy

angels.
And he said to them, 'Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.

KONTAKION OF THE EXALTATION
4th Mode
Lifted up on the Cross of your own will, to the new commonwealth that bears your name grant your mercies, Christ God; make your faithful people glad by your power, granting them victories over their enemies; may they have your help in battle: a weapon of peace, and invincible trophy.
SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING
What does it mean to take up the Cross daily? It is not just a question of being prepared to die for Christ, but it is more a question of being prepared to live for Christ.
As St. Paul tells us we are called to «offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God - this is your true and proper worship» (Rom. 12: 1-3), and likewise St. Peter tells us «you also like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ» (1 Pet. 2: 4-6). Christ gave his life for us, and asks us to give our lives to Him.
The offering of our lives is to be daily, and is hardest on the difficult days, the days when we are made to feel uncomfortable and unwelcome for being Christians. The difficult days would be difficult no matter where we are or who we are. They would be no easier in a monastery, nor would we find them easier if we were saints.
Saints only become saints by following Christ on the difficult days, the days when they don’t really feel like doing it. However the difficult days do become easier with time and practice.
We can prepare for them through the daily practice of prayer and love for our fellow men. We can set about righting the wrongs we’ve done on the bad days when we failed, through the practice of virtue and learning from our mistakes.
A bad day is much easier to face if we have some idea as to what we could do better next time. Turning a bad day into a good day is one of the deep joys of the Christian life. It is the process that saints have become accomplished in doing.
It is the process that Christ himself went through by changing the sad day of His death into the glorious day of His Resurrection.
It was the days on which he restored Sts. Peter and Thomas to love and fellowship with Himself and their fellow Disciples. It was the day on which the prodigal son decided to return to his father’s house.
Most days though are actually the opposite where we have to ensure that a good day doesn’t turn bad. This is where true sanctity becomes developed. Despite how we might feel when we wake up, every day starts out good: «This is the day that the Lord has made» (Psal. 118). Let us take courage and ask Christ and his Saints

to strengthen us on all days.

ON THE HOLY CROSS attributed to St. John Chrysostom
Let us consider of what great blessings for us Christ's Cross has become the cause. For though the Lord's Cross sounds sad and bitter, it is in reality full of joy and radiance.
For the Cross is the salvation of the Church; the Cross is the boast of those who hope in it; the Cross is reconciliation of enemies to God and conversion of sinners to Christ.
For through the Cross we have been delivered from enmity, and through the Cross we have been joined in friendship to God.
Through the Cross we have been freed from the tyranny of the devil, and through the Cross we have been delivered from death and destruction. 'When the Cross was not proclaimed, we were held fast by death; now the, Cross is proclaimed, and we have.
Come to despise death, as though it did not exist, while we have come to long for everlasting life. 'When the Cross was not proclaimed, we were strangers to paradise; but when the Cross appeared, at once a thief was found worthy of paradise.
From such darkness the human race has crossed over to infinite light; from death it has been called to everlasting life, from corruption it has been renewed for incorruption. For the eyes of the heart are no longer covered by the darkness that comes through ignorance, but through the Cross they are flooded with the light of knowledge. The ears of the deaf are no longer shut by unbelief, for the deaf have heard the word of the Lord, and the blind have recovered their sight to see the glory of God. These are the gifts we are given through the Cross.
What blessing has not been achieved for us through the Cross? The Cross is proclaimed, and faith in God is confessed and truth prevails in the whole inhabited world.
The Cross is proclaimed, and martyrs are revealed and confession of Christ prevails. The Cross is proclaimed, and the resurrection is revealed, life is made manifest, the kingdom of heaven is assured.
The Cross has become the cause of all these things, and through the Cross we have been taught to sing. What then is more precious than the Cross? What more profitable for our souls? So let us not be ashamed to name the Cross, but let us confess it with total confidence.

Day 18-Sep-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Martyrs Bidzin, Elisbar and Shavel, Princes of Georgia

St Eumenes, bishop of Gortyrna (7th c.)

"He gave himself to Christ with his whole heart from his youth, freeing himself from two heavy burdens: the burden of riches and the burden of the flesh. He freed himself from the first by giving away all his goods to the poor and needy, and from the latter by strict fasting. He thus healed himself and was able to heal others. Passionless and filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit, Eumenius shone with a radiance that could not be hidden, as it is written: 'A city set on a hill cannot be hid' (Matt. 5:14), and so holy Eumenius could not be hidden from the world. Seeing him, the people chose him as their bishop in Gortyna. As a bishop, he governed Christ's flock as a good shepherd. He was a father to the poor, riches to the needy, consolation to the sad, healing to the sick and a marvellous wonder-worker. He worked many miracles by his prayers: he killed a poisonous snake, drove out demons, healed many of the sick, and did this not only in his home city but in Rome and in the Thebaid. In the Thebaid, he brought rain from God in a time of drought, and there finally finished his earthly course and entered into the eternal presence of his Lord. He lived and worked in the seventh century." (Prologue)

St Ariadne of Phrygia (2nd c.)

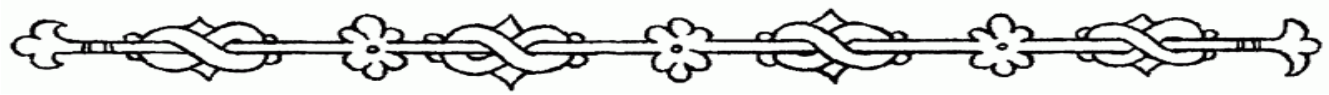
She lived during the reign of the Emperor Hadrian in the town of Promisea in Phrygia. Though a Christian, she was the slave of a pagan nobleman named Tertullus. To celebrate his son's birthday, Tertullus ordered his entire household to come to a pagan temple and make sacrifice to the idols; but Ariadne stayed home, praying to the only true God. This infuriated Tertullus, who beat her, threw her in prison, then drove her from his house. He quickly changed his mind and sent his servants to bring her back. When Ariadne saw her persecutors drawing near, she knelt by a large rock and prayed. The rock split open and hid her. At this point, the Synaxarion says that Angels bearing spears appeared around the rock and drove her pursuers away. The Prologue says that the servants, unable to find Ariadne, quarrelled among themselves, came to blows, and died at one another's hands.

Day 18-Sep-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Galatians 4:28-5:10; Mark 6:54-7:8
28 Brethren, we are, just as Isaac, children of promise, 29 and it is now as it was then: the one who was born according to the flesh persecuted the one who was born according to the Spirit.
So it is even now! 30 However, what does the Scripture say? Throw out the servant-girl and her son, because the son of the servant will not inherit with the son of the free woman.
f 31 And so, brethren, we are not children of a servant, but children of the free woman! 5 Freedom in Christ or yoke of slavery Therefore, stand firm in the freedom by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of slavery! 2 Behold, I, Paul, tell you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no profit to you! 3Yes, once again, I testify to everyone who receives circumcision that he is [now] under duty to accomplish the entire law! 4You who desire to be justified by the law are no longer under Christ: you have fallen away from grace.
5 As for us, through the Spirit, we wait by faith for the hope of righteousness, 6 since in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value,a only faith working through love.
7 You were running so well! Who came to block your way so that you would not obey the truth? 8 This persuasion is not from him who calls you! 9 [Remember], a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough! 10 I have confidence toward you in the Lord that you will take no other view; but whoever troubles you will bear his [own] judgment, whoever that [person] may be.

Gospel Reading:
54 When they came out of the boat, the people immediately recognized Jesus.
e 55 They swarmed that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard that he was.
56 Wherever he entered, into villages, cities, or into the country, people laid the sick in the marketplaces and begged him to be able to touch just the fringe of his garment; and as many as touched him were made well.
7 Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came from Jerusalem and gathered to [see] Jesus.
2 When they saw that some of his disciples were eating bread with defiled (that is,

unwashed) hands, they found fault.
3 (For the Pharisees and all the Jews hold to the tradition of the presbyters and do not eat unless they wash their hands and forearms.
4[Also], they do not eat when they return from the marketplace unless they [first] bathe themselves; and there are many other things which they have received and observe: washings of cups, pitchers, bronze vessels, and couches.
) 5 The Pharisees and the scribes asked him, 'Why is it that your disciples do not live by the tradition of the presbyters, but eat their bread with unwashed hands?' 6 Jesus answered them, 'Well did Isaias (Isaiah) prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.
7 But in vain do they express adoration before me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.
8 Indeed, you set aside the commandment of God and hold fast to human tradition —the washing of pitchers and cups, and you do many other such things.



Day 19-Sep-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Saint Theodore, Prince of Yaroslavl, and his sons David and Constantine

Martyrs Trophimus, Sabbatius, and Dorymedon of Synnada (278)

Saints Trophimus and Sabbatius came to Antioch during a great festival of Apollo and Daphne. Sorrowing for the blindness of the people they presented themselves to Atticus, the governor, and announced that they were Christians. Sabbatius was tortured so cruelly that he died in his sufferings; Trophimus was sent to Synnada, where he in turn was tortured, then imprisoned barely alive. An official of that city, Dorymedon, was moved to pity and came to the prison to care for Trophimus. (The Great Horologion says that he was still a pagan at the time, the Prologue that he was a secret Christian).

When a pagan festival came, Dorymedon refused to worship the idols and proclaimed himself a Christian. He and Trophimus together were tortured, thrown to wild beasts (who would not touch them), and finally beheaded.

Holy Martyr Zosimas the Hermit of Cilicia (4th c.)

Dometian, a prince and a fierce persecutor of Christians, was hunting in the mountains when he came upon an old man surrounded by wild beasts, who were as gentle and tame as lambs in his presence. When asked who he was, the old man answered that he was Zosimas, a Christian who had left the persecutors in the city to live among the beasts instead. Dometian, hearing that Zosimas was a Christian, ordered him seized and bound, and subjected him to many tortures. When the holy man was wounded and beaten all over, the prince tied a rock around his neck and hanged him from a tree, mocking him with the words 'Command a wild beast to come, then we will all believe!' Zosimas prayed, and at once a large lion appeared, came up to Zosimas, and took the weight of the rock on its head to ease the martyr's sufferings. The terrified prince freed Zosimas, who died of his wounds not long afterward.

Day 19-Sep-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Galatians 5:11-21; Mark 7:5-16

11 But brother, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? If it
were so, the stumbling block of the cross would have been removed.
12 Indeed, I wish that those who disturb you would then emasculate themselves!
13 As for you, brethren, you were called to freedom! Only, do not use your freedom
to satisfy the flesh, but through love, become each others' servants 14 because
the whole law is fulfilled in one message, which is this one, 'You shall love your
neighbor as yourself.
15 But if you bite and devour each other, be careful that you do not end up in
mutual destruction.
16 I say this: walk by the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh.
17 What the {fallen} flesh desires is against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the
flesh! Yes, these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the
things that you desire.
18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.
19 Now, the works of the flesh are obvious.
They are: adultery, sexual immorality, impurity, lust, 20 idolatry, the practice of
magic, hatred, strife, selfish ambitions, outbursts of anger, rivalries, divisions,
heresies, 21 envyings, murders, excess drinking, orgies, and similar things.
About these, I warn you, as I have done in the past: those who practice such
things will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

Gospel Reading:

5 The Pharisees and the scribes asked him, 'Why is it that your disciples do not
live by the tradition of the presbyters, but eat their bread with unwashed hands?' 6
Jesus answered them, 'Well did Isaias (Isaiah) prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is
written: 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.
7 But in vain do they express adoration before me, teaching as doctrines the
commandments of men.
8 Indeed, you set aside the commandment of God and hold fast to human tradition
—the washing of pitchers and cups, and you do many other such things.
9 He said to them, 'How ingeniously do you reject the commandment of God in
order to keep your tradition! 10 For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your
mother; and, 'Whoever speaks evil of father or mother should be put to death.
11 But you say, 'If a man tells his father or mother, 'Whatever [support] you might

have received from me is Corban (that is, dedicated to God)"
12 then you no longer allow him to do anything for his father or mother.
13 Thus, you nullify the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down.
And you do many [other] things like this.
14 Jesus called the entire crowd to himself and said to them, 'Hear me, all of you, and understand! 15 There is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile; it is what comes out of a person that defiles the person.
16 Anyone who has ears for listening should listen!'

Day 20-Sep-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Saint Michael the Prince and Saint Theodore the Boyar
Holy Monk and New Martyr Hilarion the Cretan

† Great Martyr Eustathius (Eustace) Placidas, with his family (118)

Before baptism he was a renowned military commander under Trajan. While hunting in the woods, he met a great stag with a shining Cross between his antlers. Through the stag, the Lord spoke to Placidas (his pagan name) and told him to find a priest and be baptized into Christ. Returning home, he found that his wife Tatiana had also had a vision in which she was told to become a Christian. They were baptized, Placidas receiving the name Eustathius, and Tatiana the name Theopiste; their two sons were baptized with them. Eustathius and his family were almost immediately subjected to a series of grievous trials, in which all were separated from one another. After years of hardship they were re-united, and returned to Rome with honor when the Emperor sought out Eustathius to command his army once again. But when the Emperor Hadrian (who had succeeded Trajan) commanded them to worship the idols, all of them refused. They were put together into a large bronze ox which was heated white-hot in a fire. When their bodies were removed, they were found to be dead but intact. The Prologue concludes, 'Thus this glorious general gave to Caesar that which is Caesar's, and to God that which is God's, and entered into the eternal Kingdom of Christ our God.'

Holy Martyrs Hypatius and Andrew, Confessors of the Holy Icons (8th c.)

They were friends from childhood, fellow-strugglers for holiness. Their godly way of life attracted the attention of the Bishop of Ephesus, who made Hypatius a bishop and Andrew a deacon and itinerant preacher. During the reign of Leo the Isaurian (714-41) they were both imprisoned for confessing the Orthodox faith and defending the veneration of the holy icons. They were subjected to various tortures, including having icons set afire on their heads in mockery of their faithfulness. They were executed near Constantinople and their bodies thrown to the dogs.

Sts Anastasius, Theodore, Euprepius and Anastasius the Younger, confessors and disciples of St Maximos the Confessor (7th c.)

These saints were disciples of St Maximos the Confessor (January 21) and suffered with him for their condemnation of the Monothelite doctrine promoted by the Emperor Constans II. Anastasius the elder (who had been the Papal representative to Constantinople) and Anastasius the younger were present at the Lateran Council called by St Martin, Pope of Rome (April 13), which condemned the Monothelite heresy. For this the Pope himself, and the two confessors named Anastasius, were seized by the Emperor. Along with St Maximos, the two endured many tortures; when St Maximos had his right hand cut off and his tongue cut out, Anastasius the elder suffered the same punishment. They, along with their fellow-disciples Euprepius and Theodore and St Maximos himself, were sent into exile to Lazica in the Caucasus, where all of them died. Euprepius died after one year; Saint Maximos after three years; Anastasius the younger a few days before St Maximos; Anastasius the elder after seven years of exile; and Theodore after twenty years. All remained steadfast until the end, and all are proclaimed as Confessors of the Faith.

Day 20-Sep-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Readings of the day: Galatians 6:2-10; Mark 7:14-24

2 Bear each others' burdens, and thus fulfil the law of Christ.
3 If anyone thinks that he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.
4 But let everyone test his own work: then one can take pride in himself, not by comparison with someone else.
5 Yes, each one will bear his own burden, 6 but everyone who is being taught in the word should share all good things with the one who teaches.
7 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked; whatever someone sows is what he will reap.
8 Whoever sows to the field of self-indulgence will reap corruption from the flesh. But the one who sows to the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit.
9 Let us not grow tired of doing what is good, for we will reap in due season, if we do not give up.
10 And so, as we have the opportunity, let us do what is good toward all, especially to those who belong to the household of the faith.

Gospel Reading:

14 Jesus called the entire crowd to himself and said to them, 'Hear me, all of you, and understand! 15 There is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile; it is what comes out of a person that defiles the person.
16 Anyone who has ears for listening should listen!' 17 When he had entered into a house away from the crowd, his disciples asked him about the parable.
18 He said to them, 'Are you also without understanding? Do you not perceive that whatever goes into someone from the outside cannot defile that person
19 because it does not go into his heart but into the stomach, and then into the sewer (thus he declared all foods to be clean)k?' 20 He said, 'What comes out of a person is what defiles that person.
21 Indeed, it is from within, out of human hearts, that evil thoughts proceed: sexual immorality, theft, murder, 22 adultery, greed,a wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, and foolishness.
23 All these evil things come from within and make a person unclean.
24 From there, he arose and went away to the borders of Tyre and Sidon.
He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it, yet he could not escape notice.

Day 21-Sep-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Leavetaking of the Exaltation of the Cross
Holy Prophet Jonas (Jonah) (9th c. BC)

His story is told in the Old Testament book that bears his name. He is counted as one of the twelve 'minor prophets.' According to one tradition recorded in the Synaxaria, he was the son of the widow of Zarephath, resurrected by the holy Elias (July 20).

The song of Jonah, I called to the Lord out of my distress (Jonah 2:2-9) is the Sixth Biblical Ode of the Matins canon, and forms the basis of countless troparia, many of which meditate upon the Jonah's time in the belly of the sea-monster as a type of Christ's sojourn in the tomb. The Book of Jonah is read in its entirety on Holy Saturday.

The Prophet Jonah is commemorated tomorrow, September 22, on the Slavic calendar.

Apostle Quadratus (Codratus) of the Seventy (130)

He was one of the Seventy appointed by Christ Himself. After Christ's Ascension, Quadratus preached the Gospel in Athens, then served as a bishop in Athens, then in Magnesia. He was stoned by the pagans, then imprisoned and starved to death in prison. It is said that he wrote a defense of the Christian faith which caused the Emperor Hadrian to decree that Christians were not to be persecuted without special cause. He was buried in Magnesia.

Our Venerable Father Joseph of Zaonikiev Monastery(1612)

He was a peasant named Hilarion in the district of Vologda, and lived a simple, laboring life until he began to lose his sight. Not despairing, Hilarion went to all the churches nearby and asked that services of intercession be offered for him. One day, during the Divine Liturgy, Hilarion beheld a man in white clothing who told him that his name was Cosmas, blessed him, and told him that he would soon be healed. The next day Hilarion was going to church again and the Holy Unmercenaries Cosmas and Damian appeared to him along with an icon of the Mother of God. A voice from the icon said that the

people must cleanse the place where he stood and erect a cross there. Upon venerating the icon, Hilarion was instantly and completely healed. Returning to his village, he joyfully told what had happened. The villagers cleansed the place, as commanded in Hilarion's vision, set up a cross, and built a chapel to house the icon, which began to work many miracles. When the bishop learned of these events, he determined to found a monastery on that spot, and made Hilarion the first monk, giving him the name of Joseph. Saint Joseph spent the next thirty years there in prayer and great asceticism: he would spend the winter nights without sleep, standing in prayer before the miraculous icon of the Theotokos. He reposed in peace and was buried in the chapel that he and his fellow-villagers had built years before.

Finding of the Relics of St Dimitri of Rostov (1752)

St Dimitri is commemorated October 28.

Day 21-Sep-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Ephesians 1:1-9; Mark 7:24-30

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus, faithful in Christ Jesus: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! God's purpose

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.

4He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, so that we would be holy and without blemish before him in love.

5He also foreordained us for adoption {as his children} through Jesus Christ according to his purpose and will.

6 This is to the praise of the glory of his grace, by which he freely bestowed favor on us in the Beloved.

7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our sins, according to the riches of his grace 8 which he showered upon us in all wisdom and insight.

9 He has revealed to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he had determined beforehand in Christ.

Gospel Reading:

24 From there, he arose and went away to the borders of Tyre and Sidon.
He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it, yet he could not escape notice.

25 Having heard about Jesus, a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit came and fell down at his feet.

26 Now, this woman was a Greek, of Syro-Phoenician descent.
She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

27 But Jesus said to her, 'Let the children be filled first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and to throw it to the little dogs!' 28 But she answered, 'Yes, Lord. Yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs!' 29 Jesus said to her, 'For saying this, you may go your way! The demon has gone out of your daughter.

30 She went away to her house and found the child having been laid on the bed, with the demon gone out.

Day 22-Sep-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Saint Phocas the Gardener
Hieromartyr Phocas, Bishop of Sinope (102)

He was a zealous, wise and wonder-working bishop in his birthplace, Sinope, which lies on the southern shore of the Black Sea. For bringing many idolators to faith in Christ, he was hated by the pagans. He was arrested by the governor Africanus, subjected to various tortures,and finally scalded to death in a bath-house. He contested for the Faith during the reign of the Emperor Trajan.

Venerable Cosmas, desert-dweller of Zographou, Mt Athos (1323)

"Saint Cosmas came from Bulgaria where his devout parents provided him with a good education in Slavonic and Greek. They wanted him to marry but he was drawn by the love of Christ and, unknown to them, made his way to the Holy Mountain of Athos to become a monk at the Bulgarian monastery of Zographou. On the feast of the Annunciation at the Monastery of Vatopedi, he saw a woman among those serving in the Church and in the refectory, and he was grieved at first to observe this breach of the monastic rule, but overjoyed when he realized that it was the Mother of God who had appeared to him in this way.

"He was clothed in the holy angelic Habit and, after some time, was ordained priest. One day, as he was praying before the icon of the Mother of God, asking her with tears how to achieve his salvation, he heard a voice saying, 'Let my servant withdraw to the desert outside the monastery.' He was obedient to the will of God and, with the blessing of his Abbot, lived in silence from then on. Some years later, he was found worthy of the grace of discernment of thoughts and of beholding things happening elsewhere, as well as of other spiritual gifts. In the course of many years, he was the spiritual helper of a great number of monks. At the end of his life, Christ appeared to him saying that he would shortly have a great trial to endure from the Devil. Indeed, the prince of demons made his appearance next day with a host of his servants bewailing and bemoaning their inability to annihilate their great enemy Cosmas, who had held them in check for so long and gained possession, by his virtue, of the throne in Heaven that had once been

Lucifer's. Taking a heavy stick, the demon beat the Saint so violently that he left him half-dead. As God allowed, Saint Cosmas died in peace two days later, on 22 September 1323. When the fathers came from the monastery to bury him, the wild animals gathered round. They kept silent until the end of the service, but howled unusually loud as his body was covered with earth. Then having paid their respects, they made off into the wilderness. Forty days later, the monks came to take up the body of Saint Cosmas and translate it to the monastery, but it was no longer in the grave. Where it now is God alone knows." (Synaxarion)

Day 22-Sep-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Ephesians 1:7-17; Mark 8:1-10
7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our sins,
according to the riches of his grace 8 which he showered upon us in all wisdom
and insight.
9 He has revealed to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure
which he had determined beforehand in Christ.
10 This came into effect when the times had been fulfilled, to bring together all
things under Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth; yes, in
him! 11 In him, an inheritance was assigned to us, foreordained according to the
purpose of him who works all things after the counsel of his will.
12 And the end result is that we, who had hoped in Christ, should be to the praise
of his glory.
13 You also, when you heard the word of the truth which is the Good News of your
salvation, and having believed in it, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of
promise.
14 He is a pledge of our inheritance, until the redemption of those who are God's
possession, to the praise of his glory! 15 For this same reason, I too, having heard
of the faith in the Lord Jesus which is among you and the love which you have
toward all the saints, 16 do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of
you in my prayers.
17 [I pray] that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you
a spirit of wisdom and revelation to bring you to full knowledge of him.
Gospel reading:

8 In those days, a very great crowd was [assembled] there and the people had
nothing to eat.
Jesus called his disciples to himself and told them, 2'I have compassion on the
people because they have stayed with me for three days now, and they have
nothing to eat.
3If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way, for some of
them came from far away.
4His disciples replied, 'From where could we satisfy these people with bread, here,
in a deserted place?' 5Jesusa asked them, 'How many loaves do you have?' They
replied, 'Seven.
6 Jesus directed the crowd to sit down on the ground, and he took the seven
loaves.

After giving thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to serve, and they served the people.
7 They also had a few small fish.
After blessing them, Jesus also told them to serve the fish.
8 The people ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up seven baskets of broken pieces that were left over.
9 Those who had eaten were about four thousand.
After this, Jesus sent the people away.
The Pharisees ask for a sign – The yeast of the Pharisees 10 Right after this, he got into the boat with his disciples and arrived into the region of Dalmanutha.

Day 23-Sep-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Holy Martyr Iraida (Rhais)
Holy New Martyr Nicholas Pantopolis
Holy New Martyr John of Epirus

† The Conception of John the Baptist

"On this day are celebrated God's mercy, His wondrous act and His wisdom: His mercy towards the devout and righteous parents of St John, the aged Zacharias and Elisabeth, who had all their lives begged a child of God; the wonder of the conception of John in Elisabeth's more-than-aged womb; and the wisdom of the dispensation of man's salvation." (Prologue) The story of the Baptist's conception is told in the first chapter of St Luke's Gospel.

Holy Martyr Iraida (Rais) of Alexandria (308)

She was an Egyptian maiden, variously called Iraida, Rais and Raida. One day, while drawing water from a well near the sea, she saw a ship laden with Christians being taken by their pagan persecutors to torture and death. By God's grace, Iraida was touched by a desire to suffer for the Lord. She went to the ship, confessed herself to be a Christian, and was immediately taken prisoner with the other servants of Christ. They were all taken to the Egyptian town of Antinopolis, where Iraida was the first of the company to be beheaded.

New Martyr John of Epirus (1814)

He was born to Muslim parents in Konitsa of Albania — the ancient region of Epirus. His father was a prominent ruler among the Muslims and a member of the Sufi order, sometimes called dervishes, a mystical Islamic sect. John himself became a prominent Sufi and settled in Joannina. Though not a Christian, he attended to his conscience and lived a sober and prayerful life.

Over time, he became increasingly attracted to the Christian faith and, in time, asked for holy Baptism. No Christian in his region dared to baptize him, knowing the reprisals that would follow. So John migrated to Ithaka, was baptized, and settled there in a village called Xiromeron, where he married

and lived as a simple countryman. In 1813, John's father somehow learned where he was, and that he had become a Christian. He sent two Sufis to bring him back and restore him to the Muslim faith. Because of this, the Ottoman authorities on Ithaka learned who he was and brought him before a judge. To each of the judge's questions John would only reply 'I am a Christian and I am called John.'

Realizing that no amount of persuasion or coercion would move him, the authorities determined to behead him. At his execution, since they would not loose his hands so that he could make the sign of the Cross, John cried out 'Lord, Remember me when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom!' With these words he submitted himself to a Martyr's end. The Turks intended to leave his body for the dogs, but pious Christians retrieved it and secretly gave it honorable burial.

Day 23-Sep-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 10:23-28; Matthew 24:34-44

23 'All things are lawful for me,' but not all things are profitable.
'All things are lawful for me,' but not all things build up.
24 We should not seek our own good, but our neighbor's good.
Issues of conscience 25 You may eat whatever is sold at the market, asking no question for the sake of conscience, 26 for 'the earth is the Lord's, and its fullness.
c 27 If you are invited for a meal by an unbeliever (and if you are inclined to accept), eat whatever is set before you, asking no questions for the sake of conscience.
d 28 But if anyone says to you, 'This was offered to idols,' do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for the sake of conscience, for 'the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness.

Gospel Reading:

33 Likewise, when you see all these things, know that the time is near, even at the doors.
34 Amen, I tell you that this generation will not pass away, until all these things are accomplished.
35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.
36 No one knows that day and hour, not even the angels of heaven, but only my Father.
37 As in the days of Noah, so will it be at the coming of the Son of Man.
38 Just as in those days which were before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark.
39 They did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will it be at the coming of the Son of Man.
40 Then, two men will be in the field: one will be taken and one will be left; 41 two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and one will be left! 42 Therefore, watch, because you do not know in what hour your Lord is coming.
43 However, know this, that if the master of the house had known in what watch of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into.

44 Therefore, be ready, for it is at an hour which you do not expect that the Son of Man will come.

Day 24-Sep-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Saint Coprius

† Holy Protomartyr Thecla, Equal to the Apostles (1st c.)

She was born in Iconium of prominent pagan parents. At the age of eighteen she was instructed in the Faith of Christ by the Apostle Paul himself. She forsook her family and her betrothed, vowing herself to a life of virginity in the service of Christ. She traveled in the ministry of the Gospel with St Paul. After many travels and sufferings for the sake of Christ, she retired to Seleucia to devote herself to prayer and asceticism. There she healed many of the sick by her prayers, and brought many more to the Faith. Some local doctors envied her and sent some young men to rape her, superstitiously thinking that her healing powers might reside in her virginity. The Prologue says 'Thecla fled from these insolent young men and, when she saw that they would catch her, prayed to God for help in front of a rock, and the rock opened and hid the holy maiden and bride of Christ. This rock was her hiding-place and her tomb.'

St Silouan, elder of Mt Athos (1938) (September 11 OC)

He was a Russian peasant who traveled to Mt Athos and became a monk in the Russian Monastery of St Panteleimon. He lived so simply, humbly and quietly that he might be forgotten had not Fr Sophrony (Sakharov) become his spiritual child and, after the Saint's repose, written a book describing his life and teaching: St Silouan of Mt Athos, one of the great spiritual books of our time. It was through Fr Sophrony's efforts that St Silouan was glorified as a Saint.

Following a vision of Christ Himself, St Silouan withdrew to a hermitage to devote himself entirely to prayer; but he was called back to serve as steward to the monastery. Though he now supervised some two hundred men, he only increased his prayers, withdrawing to his cell to pray with tears for each individual worker under his care. For more than fifteen years he struggled with demonic attacks during prayer until he was almost in despair. At this point

Christ spoke to him in a vision, saying 'The proud always suffer from demons.' Silouan answered 'Lord, teach me what I must do that my soul may become humble.' To this he received the reply, Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not. Silouan made this his discipline in every moment of his life, and was granted the grace of pure prayer. He said that if he ever let his mind wander from the fire of hell, disruptive thoughts would once again plague him. In his humiliation he was filled with a pervasive love for all — he said many times that the final criterion of true Christian faith is unfeigned love for enemies, and that 'to pray for others is to shed blood.'

St Silouan demonstrates that the Church's true Theologians are those who manifest in their own lives the fruits of the Church's hesychastic spirituality, however insignificant they may appear to the eyes of the world.

St Stephen, First-crowned King of Serbia (Simon the Monk) (1224)

"Crowned king at Zica, his foundation, by his brother and spiritual father, St Sava, he was a devout Christian and a wise and peace-loving ruler. Stephen, together with St Sava, raised Orthdooxy to great heights among his people. At his desire, St Sava made him a monk at the time of his death, giving him the name of Simon. He entered into rest in the Lord on September 24th, 1224, and his relics are preserved at Studenica." (Prologue)

Day 24-Sep-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

The calling of the first apostles
2 Corinthians 9:6-11; Luke 5:1-11
6 Or is it only Barnabas and I who are obliged to work? 7 What soldier ever serves at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who feeds a flock and does not drink from the flock's milk? 8 Do I speak these things according to human ways? Does not the law say the same thing as well? 9 For it is written in the law of Moses, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.
Is it for the oxen that God shows cares, 10 or does he say these things for our benefit? Yes, it was written for us, because whoever plows and whoever threshes should do so with the hope to have their share {of a harvest}.
11 If we sowed to you spiritual things, is it [such] a great thing if we reap your material things?

Gospel Reading: The calling of the first apostles

5 Now it happened, while the multitude pressed on him and heard the word of God, that he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret.
2 He saw two boats standing by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and they were washing their nets.
3 Jesus entered into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat.
4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep, and let down your nets for a catch.
5 Simon answered him, 'Master, we worked all night and took nothing! But at your

word, I will let down the net.
6 When they had done this, they caught a great multitude of fish, and their net was breaking.
7 They beckoned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them.
They came and filled both boats, so [much] that they began to sink.
8 But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord!' 9 He and all who were with him were amazed at their catch of fish; 10 and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon.
Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid! From now on, you will be catching people alive.
11 When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING
In today's small and beautiful Gospel reading, the calling of the first disciples is described.
At the beginning of His public ministry, the Lord taught in Galilee and His future disciples were part of the audience.
They had 'wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth' (Luke 4:22) and tasted His words, 'sweeter than honey.
' (cf. PsPsal. 118:103) In the beginning of Creation, all things came into being through the word of the Lord.
His word acts forever, and whoever accepts it is renewed and regenerated.
The crowd thronged around Him and so that He might not be crushed, Christ spoke to them from the fishing boat of Peter.
When the Lord finished His teaching, He who knew the past and the future, gave the commandment to Peter to guide his boat deeper into the lake and cast again his nets to fish.
Peter expressed his frustration of having worked all night without any result, yet with faith hoping against hope, (RomRom. 4. 4: 18) he obeyed the word of Jesus.
Such faith is that of the Righteous, which dissents to man's reason and crucifies his mind.
Wherever there is a cross, however, there is also the grace of the Resurrection; there is the power of God that defeats the natural order.
Peter knew every hand-span of the lake, and that is why his act of obedience surpasses all human expectation.
The commandment of God is 'exceeding broad' (PsPsal. 118:96) and His word is beyond the measure of man. The Christian is crucified in his struggle to keep the commandment until the grace of God comes in power from on high, which causes the transition, making possible 'things which are impossible with men.' (Luke 18:27) Peter cast his nets and, that time, they split from the multitude of fishes.
The hearts of the Apostles also broke open, overflowing from the contact they had

with the burning word of the Lord, Who is ‘greater than our heart’. (see 1 John 3:20). The word of God is quickening and when it touches the heart it provokes wonder and fear.
Peter was an impulsive man, vehement and simple, and he could not bear the revelation of the glory of the Lord.
He fell on his knees, considering himself unworthy to stand in His presence, like all the Righteous, the Prophets and the Saints in the course of the ages who at each approach of the Holy of Holies confessed themselves to be ‘dust and ashes’.
When we confess our sins, we are true and we attract the Spirit of truth which loves us and comes to dwell within us and establishes us as disciples of the Lord Jesus.
When Peter bid the Lord, ‘Depart from me; for I am a sinful man’, Christ did not humiliate him, but answered him ‘Fear not.
’ Peter entered the current of the word of God which gradually cleansed him and transforms him into a fisher of men.
God the Word Himself, thathat is, took root within him and from then on his heart was able to bear good words which would inform the hearts of those who heard them and impart grace.
(see EphEph. 4:19) All the Saints live in this way.
They receive the word of God which ignites a flame within them.
Through the confession of their unworthiness, this word takes root in their heart, renewing all their being and transforming them from common people into co-workers of God for the salvation of the world.
If when ‘a man is born into the world’ (see John 16:21) it is a miracle that causes joy in heaven, how much more wondrous it is for a man to become a light-bearing child of heaven.
The Saints, in the majority, do not have children according to the flesh, but through their word and prayer they give birth, and after death, to legions of children born for Paradise

Day 25-Sep-2023 Monday

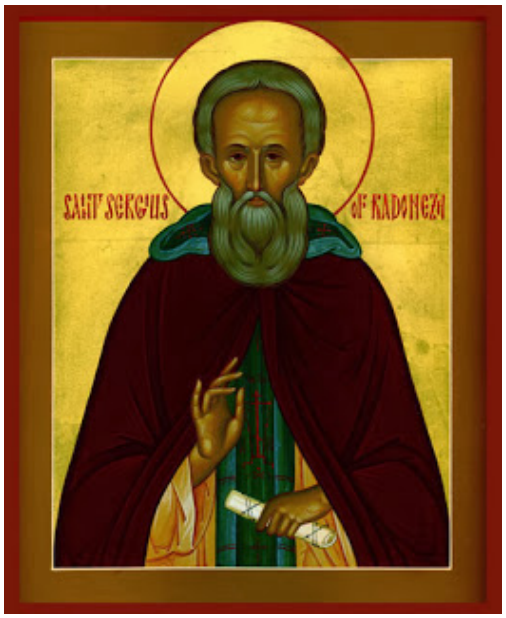
Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Saint Euphrosyne of Suzdal
Holy Monk and Martyr Paphnutius the Anchorite and his 546 Companions

† Our Righteous Mother Euphrosyne (~445)

She was the daughter of a wealthy Christian, Paphnutius, who with his wife brought up Euphrosyne in piety. Not wishing to marry, she secretly fled her home and its wealth, dressed herself in men's clothing and entered a monastery using the name of Smaragdus. There she lived in asceticism for thirty-eight years. She only revealed her identity on her death bed. Her father Paphnutius became a monk in the same monastery, and entered into repose ten years after his daughter.

† Our Holy Father Sergius of Radonezh (1392)



'Our righteous Father Sergius was born in Rostov, north of Moscow, about the year 1314. Named Bartholomew in baptism, he was brought up in Radonezh, and at the death of his parents he withdrew to the wilderness to become a monk. It is notable that without having been trained in a monastery, he was of such a spiritual stature as to be able to take up the perilous eremitical life from the beginning, without falling into delusion or despondency. When he had endured with courage the deprivations of the solitary life, other monks began to come to him, for whom he was made abbot against his will. On the counsel of Philotheus, Patriarch of Constantinople, he organized his monks according to

the cenobitic life, appointing duties to each. While Anthony and Theodosius of Kiev, and the other righteous Fathers before Sergius, had established their monasteries near to cities, Sergius was the leader and light of those who went far into the wilderness, and after his example the untrodden forests of northern Russia were settled by monks. When Grand Duke Demetrius Donskoy was about to go to battle against the invading Tartars, he first sought the blessing of Saint Sergius, through whose prayers he was triumphant. Saint Sergius was adorned with the highest virtues of Christ-like humility and burning love for God and neighbor, and received the gift of working wonders, of casting out demons, and of discretion for leading souls to salvation. When he served the Divine Liturgy, an Angel served him visibly; he was also vouchsafed the visitation of the most holy Theotokos with the Apostles Peter and John. He was gathered to his Fathers on September 25, 1392. At the recovery of his holy relics on July 5th, 1422, his body and garments were found fragrant and incorrupt. His life was written by the monk Epiphanius, who knew him.' (Great Horologion)

Commemoration of the Great Earthquake at Constantinople (447) and the Miracle of the Trisagion

During the reign of the Emperor Theophilus, the city of Constantinople was visited by earthquakes for almost four months. The Emperor, the Patriarch Proclus, and the people joined in a barefoot procession to make prayer to God for their safety. While they were gathered, the tremors increased dramatically, and a young boy was taken up into the sky in the sight of the people, who fearfully cried out Kyrie eleison! When the boy came down from the heavens, he said that he had been among choirs of Angels who sang Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us! and that a voice had commanded him to tell the Patriarch that the people should make supplication to God in this way. The Patriarch instructed the people to chant this hymn, whereupon the ground stopped shaking and the child died.

The Empress Pulcheria (September 10) asked the Patriarch to order that this hymn be chanted henceforth in the Divine Liturgy, as it still is today.

Venerable Dosithea, recluse of the Kiev Caves (1776)

She was born to landed gentry of Riazan province in 1721. Her name in secular life is not recorded. For much of her childhood she was cared for by her grandmother the nun Porphyria, from whom she acquired a love for the ascetical struggle. When Porphyria took the Great Schema, the child returned home, but continued to live as much like a nun as she could. Her parents were eager to marry her as soon as possible, but she foiled their plans by leaving home at the age of fifteen, dressed as a peasant boy and calling herself Dositheus. In this guise she entered the Lavra of St Sergius. Three years later she fled to avoid discovery by her parents, and went to the Lavra of Kiev. There she was turned away, since she had no passport; so she took up the hermit's life in cave near Kitayev Skete, living only on bread, water and

a few wild plants. Before long her gifts of prophecy became known, and the counsel of 'Dositheus the Hermit' was sought out by many of the faithful. She would speak to her many visitors through a small window that did not allow them to see her face. The Empress Elizabeth visited her in 1744, and at her request 'Dositheus' received monastic tonsure. When the young Prochor Moshnin — one day to be known as St Seraphim of Sarov (January 2) — visited her, she foresaw his holy future, blessed him and directed him to the Monastery of Sarov, instructing him to practice the Jesus Prayer ceaselessly.

Later, the eremitic life was banned in Russia by Imperial decree, so 'Dositheus' moved to the Kiev Caves Lavra, then to a remote cell at the Kitaya Skete. When she discerned that the time of her death was near, she left her cell and greeted the brethren of the Skete. The next day she was found on her knees in her cell before an icon, with a piece of paper in her hand reading 'My body is ready for burial. I beg you not to touch it and to bury it in the usual way.' Only in preparing her for burial was it discovered that she was a woman. 'Dositheus the Hermit' is counted as one of the revivers of the Orthodox hesychast tradition in Russia, where it had been almost forgotten even among monastics.

Day 25-Sep-2023 Monday

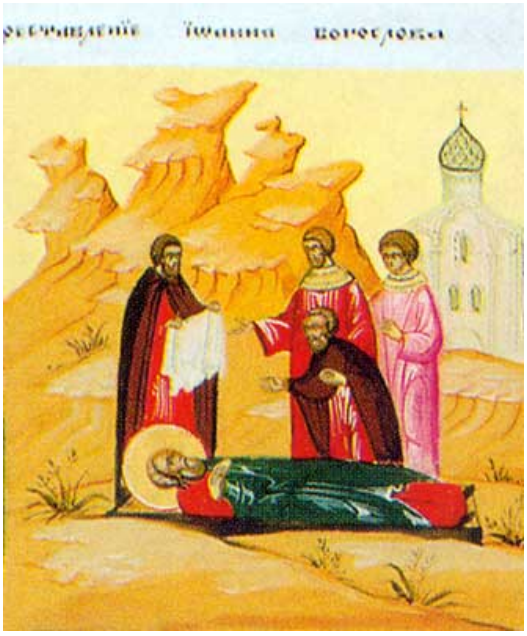
Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Ephesians 1:22-2:3; Mark 10:46-52
22 God put all things in subjection under his feet and granted him to be head over
all things for the sake of the Church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who
fills all in all.
2 The gift of God You were dead in transgressions and sins, 2and this was your
lifestyle according to the age of this world, according to the prince of the power of
the air, the spirit who now works in the children of disobedience.
3We used to live among them and we used to live in self-indulgence, doing the
desires of the {fallen} flesh and mind, and we were by nature children of wrath, just
as the others.

Gospel Reading:
46 Then, they arrived in Jericho.
As Jesus was leaving the city with his disciples and a great crowd, the son of
Timaeus, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the road.
47 When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out, 'Jesus,
you son of David, have mercy on me!' 48 Many rebuked him and told him to be
quiet.
But Bartimaeus cried out even more, 'You son of David, have mercy on me!' 49
Jesus stood still and said, 'Call him.
They called the blind man and said to him, 'Cheer up! Get up! He is calling you!' 50
Having thrown his cloak aside, he got up and came to Jesus.
51 Jesus asked him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' The blind man replied,
'Rabboni, that I may see again!' 52 Jesus said to him, 'Be on your way! Your faith
has made you well.
At once, the man received his sight and followed him along the way.

Day 26-Sep-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Repose of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist St John the Theologian



The holy Apostle was, by the world's reckoning, the nephew of our Savior, since his mother Salome was the daughter of St Joseph the Betrothed. Called 'the beloved disciple,' St John was the only one of Christ's disciples to follow Him to the Cross. He was entrusted by the Savior with the care of the most holy Theotokos, and became like another son to her, providing for her care until the day of her repose. He preached the Gospel of Christ throughout Asia Minor, especially in Ephesus. During the persecutions of the Emperor Domitian, he was taken in bonds to Rome, where he was subjected to various tortures; but when he emerged from these miraculously unharmed, he was exiled to the island of Patmos, where he wrote the book of Revelation. After the death of Domitian, he returned to Ephesus and there wrote his Gospel and Epistles. He reposed in peace at a great old age. When his disciples later opened his grave, they found that his body was not there. He is called the Theologian because of the sublimity of theological expression in his New Testament writings.

Righteous Gideon, Judge of Israel.

Day 26-Sep-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Ephesians 2:19-3:7; Mark 11:11-23

19 And so, you are no longer strangers and foreigners! Instead, you are fellow-citizens with the saints, and members of God's household,
20 being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.
Christ Jesus himself is the chief cornerstone; 21in whom the whole building, fitted together, grows into a holy sanctuary in the Lord.
22 In Christ, you too are built up into a dwelling-place of God in [the] Spirit.
3 Paul's commission and prayer For this reason, I, Paul, am the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles!
2 Surely, you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given me toward you; 3how by revelation, the mystery was made known to me, as I wrote before in a few words.
4 When you read them, you can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ, 5 which in other generations was not made known to anyone as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit.
6 I mean that the Gentiles are [now] fellow-heirs and fellow-members of the body, yes, fellow-partakers of God's promise in Christ Jesus through the Good News.
7 Of this Good News, I was made a servant, according to the gift of God's grace which was given me according to the working of his power.

Gospel Reading:

11 Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple.
After looking around at everything, since it was now evening, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.
The cursing of the fig tree – The cleansing of the temple 12 The next day, as they were coming out from Bethany, Jesus was hungry.
13 Seeing in the distance a fig tree with leaves, he came to see if perhaps, he might find something on it.
When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs.
14 Jesus then said to the tree, 'May no one ever eat fruit from you again!' and his disciples heard it.
15 They arrived in Jerusalem and Jesus entered into the temple.
He began to drive out those who did business in the temple and he overthrew the tables of the money changers, as well as the seats of those who sold doves.
16 He would not allow anyone to carry a container through the temple.

17 He taught them, saying, 'Is it not written, 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations?' But you have made it a den of thieves!'
18 When the chief priests and the scribes heard this, they considered how they might destroy him.
As it is, they feared Jesus,a because the crowd was astonished at his teaching.
19 When evening came, he left the city.
20 As they passed by in the morning, the disciples saw the fig tree withered from the roots.
21 Remembering [what had happened], Peter said to him, 'Rabbi, look! The fig tree which you cursed has withered away!'
22 Jesus answered them, 'Have faith in God! 23 For amen, I tell you that if anyone tells this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' without doubt in the heart but believing that what he says is happening; he shall have whatever he says.

Day 27-Sep-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Martyr Callistratus and the Forty-nine Martyrs with Him (288/304)

Callistratus was born in Carthage to Christian parents. In time, he joined the army, where he was the only Christian in his regiment. One of his fellow-soldiers saw Callistratus rise during the night to pray, and reported him to their commander. Callistratus was interrogated, then, when he refused to deny his faith or make sacrifice to the idols, was harshly beaten, then tied in a sack and thrown in the sea. But the sack burst open and Callistratus emerged from the sea unharmed. Seeing this, forty-nine of his fellow-soldiers confessed Christ, and were beaten and thrown into prison with Callistratus. In prison, Callistratus instructed the newly-enlightened Christians in the faith. Finally, all of them were beheaded, according to some sources in 288, according to others in 304.

Holy Apostles Mark, Aristarchus and Zenas of the Seventy

St Mark was also called John; according to Acts 12:12, the apostles gathered for prayer in Jerusalem at his mother Mary's house, and was later bishop in Byblos. St Aristarchus accompanied St Paul in his travels (Acts 16:29) and was later bishop in Syrian Apamea. St Zenas is mentioned as a lawyer in Titus 3:13, and was bishop in Lydda in Palestine.

Our Venerable Father Sabbatius, Founder of the Monastery of Solovki (1435)

He lived for many years as a monk at the Monastery of St Cyril of White Lake, where his ascetic struggles won him the respect of his brethren. To flee from the admiration of men he moved further north to Valaam Monastery. But he still attracted the good opinion of his community, so he secretly headed still further north, planning to reach the uninhabited Solovki Island in the White Sea (a large bay of the Arctic Ocean). When he reached the coast, everyone who might take him tried to dissuade him from living in such a harsh place. He answered 'My children, I have a Master who has the power to renew the strength of the old and to enfeeble the young if He so wills. He makes the poor rich, clothes the naked, provides for the destitute and satisfies the

starving with a measure of food as he fed five thousand men in the desert.'

While waiting for seasonable sailing weather he met St Germanus (July 30) who lived nearby as a hermit. Together they found a fishing boat and, casting all their trust on the Lord, made the dangerous two-day voyage and set up a hermitage on the island. It became known as a holy place, and thenceforth those living in the world knew not to settle on Solovki, or even to set foot there without good reason. After six years, St Germanus departed, and Sabbatius was left alone.

When he was old, he began to fear that he would die without receiving the life-giving Mysteries, of which he had not partaken since he left Valaam. So he returned to the mainland where he met an abbot Nathanael just as he was taking Holy Communion to a sick man. Sabbatius persuaded the abbot to hear his confession and grant him the priceless gift of Holy Communion. He then settled in a nearby chapel and made ready for his departure from this life. A wealthy merchant from Novgorod visited him to ask for his blessing. The Saint said to him, 'Spend the night here and you will see the grace of God.' The next morning the merchant came to Sabbatius' cell and found that he had reposed during the night; his cell was suffused with a beautiful scent.

The following year, St Germanus, along with St Zosimas (April 17), returned to Solovki island and founded a monastery there, which proved to be the nurturing ground of many Saints.

Holy New Martyr Aquilina (1764)

She lived in the village of Zangliverion near Thessalonika. When she was still an infant, her father killed a Turkish neighbor in an argument and, to save his life, denied his Christian faith. To compound his apostasy he promised that when his daughter came of age she too would convert. Aquilina's mother, however, held fast to her faith in Christ, and brought up her daughter to love her Savior fervently. When Aquilina reached the age of eighteen, her father told her that the time had come to formally embrace Islam; he was dismayed when she replied that she would rather suffer any torment than deny Christ. Fearing for his own life, her father handed her over to the Turkish authorities. When the usual threats and promises had no effect, she was viciously beaten three times. Some pious Christians returned her, dying, to her mother, to whom she said 'I have done as you told me, and kept the confession of our faith. Surely you didn't think I would do anything else?' With this, the holy Martyr died. The Synaxarion relates, 'As her body was taken to be buried, every place that it passed was filled with a delightful scent, and a brilliant light came forth from her grave during the night.'

Day 27-Sep-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Readings of the day: Ephesians 3:8-21; Mark 11:23-26

8 This grace was given to me, the very least of all saints, so that I might preach to
the Gentiles the unsearchable treasures of Christ 9 and make everyone see the
dispensation of the mystery which had been hidden in God for so long, in him who
created all things through Jesus Christ.
10 This happened so that now, through the Church, the manifold wisdom of God
might be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places,
11 according to the eternal purpose which God had in Christ Jesus our Lord.
12 In him, we have boldness and confident access through our faith in him.
13 Therefore, I ask that you may not lose heart because of my troubles for you, as
they are your glory!
14 And so, I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,
16 asking that according to the riches of his glory, he would grant you to be
inwardly strengthened with power through his Spirit.
17 I also pray that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, so that you may
be rooted and grounded in love.
18 May you [thus] be strengthened to comprehend with all the saints what is the
breadth and length and height and depth 19 of Christ's love which is beyond
knowledge; and that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.
20 Now, to him who is able to accomplish much more than all we can ask or think
according to the power that works in us, 21 to him be the glory in the Church and
in Christ Jesus to all generations, now and forerever and unto ages of ages.
Amen.

Gospel Reading:

23 For amen, I tell you that if anyone tells this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into
the sea, without doubt in the heart but believing that what he says is happening; he
shall have whatever he says.
24 Therefore, I tell you, whatever things you pray for and ask for, believe that you
have received them, and you shall have them.
25 Whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive; so
that your Father who is in heaven may also forgive your transgressions.
26 But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions.

Day 28-Sep-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

St Chariton the Confessor of Palestine (350)

He was born in Iconium during the reign of Aurelian, and knew St Thecla. He was arrested, tortured and condemned to death for his Christian faith. But before his execution was carried out, the cruel Emperor Aurelian died, and Chariton was freed. He travelled to Jerusalem and took up the ascetical life in the Palestinian wilderness. Monks gathered around him, and in the course of his life he established three monastic communities in the Holy Land. He died in peace at a great age. According to the Prologue, the practice of tonsuring monks originated with St Chariton.

Holy Prophet Baruch (6th c. BC)

He was the disciple and scribe of the Prophet Jeremiah; his name means "blessed." The prophetical book that bears his name is not included in the Protestant canon of scripture; if your Bible does not contain it, look for another Bible.

Holy Martyr Vatslav (Wenceslas), King of the Czechs (929)

"The grandson of St Ludmilla, he lived as king in spiritual striving in the Faith like the great ascetics, and strengthened the Orthodox faith among his people. He took care when sitting in judgement that no innocent man should suffer. In his zeal for the Christian faith and his love for his neighbour, holy Vatslav bought pagan children who had been sold as slaves and immediately baptised them, bringing them up as Christians. He translated St John's Gospel into Czech and brought the relics of St Vitus and his grandmother, Ludmilla, to Prague. His brother Boleslav invited him to stay and killed him at his court. Immediately after this, Boleslav began to make German priests and to have the Liturgy celebrated in Latin. Holy Vatslav suffered in 929. His relics are preserved in Prague." (Prologue) This is the "Good King Wenceslaus" of the popular Christmas carol.

Day 28-Sep-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Ephesians 4:14-19; Mark 11:27-33

14 The goal is that we may no longer be children, tossed back and forth and carried about by every wind of doctrine through human trickery, according to clever deceits and mistaken schemes.
15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, may we grow up in all things into him who is the head, Christ.
16 From him, the whole body, being fitted and knit together, as every joint supplies and according to the participation of each part, grows and builds itself in love.
A new way of life 17 Therefore, I say and testify in the Lord that you [should] no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind.
18 They are darkened in their understanding, cut off from God's life because of their ignorance and because of the hardening of their hearts.
19 Having become hardened, such people gave themselves up to lust and they pursue what is impure with greed.

Gospel Reading:

27 They returned to Jerusalem, and as Jesus was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the presbyters came to him.
28 They began to ask him, 'By what authority do you do these things? Who gave you the authority to do such things?' 29 Jesus replied, 'I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things.
30 The baptism of John- was it from heaven, or from men? Answer me.
31 They debated among themselves, saying, 'If we say, 'From heaven' he will reply, 'Why then did you not believe him?' 32 But dare we say, 'From men?'" They feared the people, for all considered that John was indeed a prophet.
33 They answered Jesus, 'We do not know!' Jesus said to them, 'Then neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things.

Day 29-Sep-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Saint Theophanes the Merciful of Gaza

St Cyriacus the Solitary (555/557)

He was born in Corinth of pious Christian parents. At the age of eighteen he went to Palestine, where, after studying under several holy fathers, he entered monastic life and became the disciple of St Gerasim of the Jordan. After St Gerasim's death he lived in strict solitude, asceticism and silence for many years, finally entering the monastery of St Chariton, where he reposed in peace at the age of 109. Despite his very severe asceticism, he was large and strong, remaining so until the end of his life. According to the rule of St Chariton, he and his fellow-monks ate only once a day, after sunset. In the desert, he lived for years on nothing but the raw plants that he gathered there. He said of himself that, while he was a monk, the sun never saw him eat or be angry with any man.

St Mary of Palestine (6th c.)

"She was at first a reader of the Psalter in the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem, but, being beautiful, she was a source of scandal to the sinful-minded. In order not to be a cause of sin in others, Mary withdrew to the wilderness of Souka with a basket of beans and a flask of water. She spent eighteen years in the desert and, by God's power, never lacked either beans nor water. Disciples of St Cyriacus found her during her lifetime, and later buried her." (Prologue)

Holy Martyrs Dada and those with them (4th c.)

Dada was a high Persian official serving in the court of King Shapur II, and secretly a Christian. When he was appointed governor of a province some way from the court, Dada began to worship and proclaim Christ openly. This came to the attention of the King, who sent one of his sons, Gubarlahas, to try and execute him. Dada was condemned and condemned to be thrown into a fiery furnace. But when Dada made the sign of the Cross, the fire went out, amazing the Prince and eventually leading him to convert to Christ.

The outraged King had his son thrown in prison and put to torture. Gubarlahas endured days of hideous torture without complaint and, though he had been subjected to horrible mutilations, emerged from his cell unscathed. This wonder led others, including two more of the King's own children or kin, to embrace Christ. Kazoy, the King's daughter, was allowed to enter into rest as soon as her tortures began. Gubarlahas was miraculously baptised in the midst of further tortures: A voice from on high pronounced the words of

baptism, and a shower of water and oil fell on the Martyr. Not long afterward, he perished, along with Dada and Kasdios, one of Gubarlahas' kinsmen who had been convinced of the Truth by the miracles he had seen.

Venerable Cyprian of Ustiug (1276)

"Saint Cyprian founded the Monastery of the Entry into the Temple of the Mother of God, near Ustiug in the district of Vologda, in 1212, and he made over all his property to it. He never left the monastery after he became Abbot but gave himself to ascetic labours, as if each day were his last on earth. He watched over the spiritual progress of his monks with fatherly love and willingly sacrificed his time and energy for their good. Saint Cyprian fell asleep in the Lord in 1276. His holy relics lie in his monastery." (Synaxarion)

Day 29-Sep-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Ephesians 4:17-25; Mark 12:1-12
17 Therefore, I say and testify in the Lord that you [should] no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind.
18 They are darkened in their understanding, cut off from God's life because of their ignorance and because of the hardening of their hearts.
19 Having become hardened, such people gave themselves up to lust and they pursue what is impure with greed.
20 But you did not learn Christ that way, 21 except if you failed to hear him and to be taught in him, since truth is in Jesus.
22 You were [supposed] to put away the old self which belongs to your former way of life, since it becomes ever more corrupt after the lusts of deceit.
23 Moreover, you are to be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and to put on the new self who in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of truth.
25 Therefore, putting away what is false, speak the truth to each other, for we are members of one another.
Gospel reading:

12 The parable of the tenant farmers of the vineyard He began to speak to them in parables.
'A man planted a vineyard, put a hedge around it, dug a pit for the winepress, and built a tower.
He then rented it to tenant farmers and left for another country.
2 When it was time, he sent a servant to the farmers to receive his share of the fruit of the vineyard.
3But they took the servant, beat him, and sent him away empty.
4 Again, the owner sent another servant to them, and they threw stones at him, wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully treated.
5Again he sent another; and they killed him along with many others, beating some, and killing some.
6 The man still had one left to send, his beloved son.
Finally, he sent him to them, saying: 'They will respect my son!' 7 But the tenants of the vineyard said among themselves, 'This is the heir! Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours!' 8 They took him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.
9 What then will the lord of the vineyard do? He will come to destroy the farmers,

and he will give the vineyard to others.
10 Have you not even read this Scripture: 'The very stone which the builders rejected, Has become the head of the corner.
11 This is the Lord's doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes?' The question of paying taxes to Caesar 12 They kept trying to arrest Jesus, but they feared the multitude because they understood that he had spoken the parable against them. So they left him and went away.

Day 30-Sep-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Holy Martyrs Mardonios and Stratonikos
† St Gregory the Enlightener, Bishop of Armenia (325/335)

He was a nobleman, related to the imperial houses of Persia and Armenia. When these two houses went to war with one another, Gregory withdrew to Caesarea in Cappadocia, where he heard the Gospel proclaimed and came to faith in Christ. There he also married and had two sons. After his wife's death he returned to his homeland and served in the court of Tiridates, king of Armenia. When the king discovered that Gregory was a Christian, he subjected the Saint to many tortures, finally having him cast into a pit full of mire and poisonous reptiles. But Gregory was miraculously kept alive in the pit for fourteen years, during which a widow secretyly provided for his needs. King Tiridates, still cruelly persecuting the Christians in his land, eventually went mad and became like a wild animal. In a dream, the king's sister was told that her brother would only be restored to sanity when Gregory was freed from the pit. This was done, and Gregory healed and baptised his persecutor. At the king's request, Gregory was made bishop of Armenia. As bishop he brought countless thousands to faith in Christ and is counted as the Enlightener of Armenia. In old age he retired into ascetical life, and reposed in peace.

Venerable Gregory of Pelshma (1441 or 1451)

He was born into a powerful boyar family in the city of Galich. Early in life he was drawn to the ascetical life, and was distressed when his parents arranged for him to be married at the age of only fifteen. By a mysterious providence, both his parents died before the wedding could be held, and St Gregory very soon distributed his considerable wealth to the poor, freed all his serfs, and went to the nearest monastery. Such was his holiness of life that he rose to be abbot of the monastery, but as in his youth he felt burdened by the admiration and attention of men, so he left for the monastery of St Dionysius of Glushitsa, where he strove to live a hidden life. His starets, St Dionysius, discerned Gregory's spiritual gifts and wanted him to found his own monastery, but the

Saint resisted, desiring only to live in humility and obedience, unknown to the world. At the age of 104 Gregory, with his elder's blessing, went to live as a hermit in a small cell on the banks of the River Pelshma. After a few years other monks came to live the hesychastic life with him and, as his elder had desired, Gregory against his will became the abbot of a new monastery.

Abbot Gregory excelled not only in prayer but in his works of love for the poor, many of whom came to him in times of famine, when he would give them the small reserves of the monastery. More than once he traveled to Moscow to rebuke the Princes for their evil deeds. One of these, Prince Basil II, was so angered by the 'presumption' of the Saint that he had him thrown from a bridge into a deep gorge, but he emerged miraculously unharmed.

At the age of 127, St Gregory felt his end approaching and prepared himself. He told his disciples to throw his body into a swamp when he died, but after his repose they disobeyed and gave him honorable burial. A beautiful fragrance filled the church and, for the first time, a miracle of healing was performed through the Saint's relics, which from that time forward were the source of countless wonders.

Our Father among the Saints Michael, Metropolitan of Kiev (992)

When Prince Vladimir, Equal to the Apostles (July 15), received holy Baptism, he sent an embassy to Constantinople asking that clergy be sent to enlighten the Russian land and to establish Christ's Church there. Patriarch Nicolas II Chrysoberges (December 16) appointed Michael, a wise and blameless bishop, to be Metropolitan of Russia. Saint Michael traveled to Kiev with six bishops and a large number of clergy to aid him in his daunting work. He began by baptising the Prince's family and the nobles of Kiev. Prince Vladimir used his authority to have the pagan idols pulled down, and enjoined all the people to accept Baptism. Thus the people of Kiev gathered en masse on the banks of the Dnieper and were baptized by the Metropolitan and his clergy, establishing Kiev as the first Christian city in Russia. Paganism was deeply entrenched everywhere in this wild land, and the proclamation of the Gospel was difficult and dangerous. Nonetheless, the holy Metropolitan in his own lifetime was able to cast down the idols in Novgorod and Rostov and establish the Church there.

Metropolitan Michael reposed in peace in 992, having planted in Russia the seeds of Russian Orthodoxy, which in coming generations would become the very soul of the Russian people. His relics were found to be incorrupt in the twelfth century and were translated to the Monastery of the Kiev Caves.

Day 30-Sep-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 14:20-25; Matthew 25:1-13

20 Brethren, do not be children in thoughts, yet be infants when it comes to evil. Be mature in your thoughts.
21It is written in the law: By men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers, I will speak to this people.
Yet, not even thus will they hear me, says the Lord.
22 Therefore, other tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers.
Prophesying is [also] a sign, not to the unbelieving, but to those who believe.
23 If therefore the whole Church is assembled and all speak in tongues, and someone untaught or unbelieving comes in, will this person not say that you are crazy? 24 But if all prophesy, and someone unbelieving or untaught comes in, that person is reproved by all, and is judged by all.
25 And thus, the secrets of this person's heart shall be revealed in order to fall down on his face and expressed adoration toe God, declaring that God is among you indeed.

Gospel Reading:

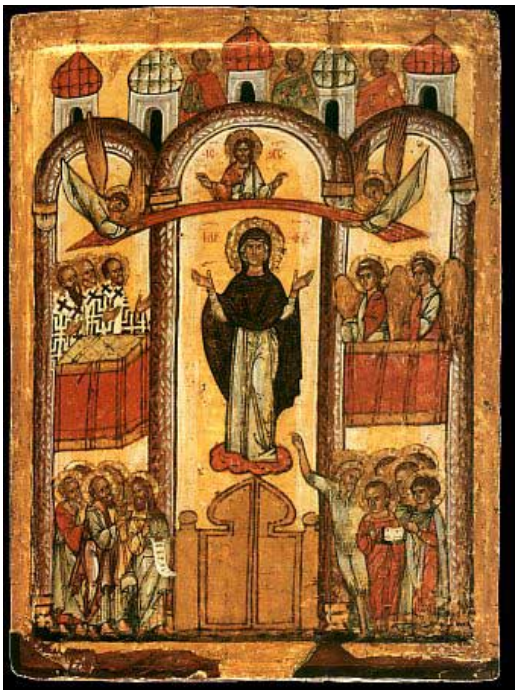
25 'Then, the Kingdom of Heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.
2 Five of them were foolish, and five were wise.
3Those who were foolish took their lamps but brought no oil along with them,
4whereas the wise ones brought oil in their vessels along with their lamps.
5 Now, since the bridegroom was late, they all became tired and fell asleep.
6 But at midnight there was a cry, 'Behold! The bridegroom is coming! Come out to meet him!' 7 Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps.
8 The foolish virgins said to the wise ones, 'Give us some of your oil because our lamps are going out.
9 But the wise virgins answered: 'What if there is not enough for us and you? You should rather go to those who sell [oil] and buy some for yourselves.
10 While they went away to buy [oil], the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and then the door was shut.
11 Afterwards, the other virgins also arrived and said: 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' 12

But he answered, 'Amen, I tell you that I do not know you!' 13 Watch therefore, for you do not know the day or the hour

Day 01-Oct-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

The Protection of Our Most Holy Lady the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary



On October 1, 911, during the reign of Emperor Leo the Wise, an all-night vigil was being held at the Blachernae Church of the Mother of God in Constantinople, with many of the faithful crowding the church. St Andrew the Fool for Christ (commemorated tomorrow, October 2) was standing at the back of the church with his disciple Epiphanius. At around four in the morning, the most holy Theotokos appeared above the people, clothed in resplendent garments, surrounded by indescribable radiance, and holding a veil in her outstretched hands, as though to protect all the people. St Andrew said to Epiphanius 'Do you see how the Queen and Lady of all is praying for the whole world?' Epiphanius replied 'Yes, Father, I see it and stand in dread.' This wonderful event is recorded in Epiphanius' life of St Andrew. Because of it, the Church keeps an annual feast on this date.

Note: This feast is particularly well-loved in the Slavic churches. In 1960, the Greek church transferred its observance to October 28, in memory of the Mother of God's protection of the Greek forces holding the Albanian front against Italy in 1940.

St Romanos the Melodist of Constantinople (556)

He was born in Emessa in Syria, probably of Jewish parents. He served as a deacon in Beirut, then in Constantinople at the time of Patriarch Euphemius (490-496). He was illiterate, had no musical training, and was a poor singer; thus he was despised by many of the more cultivated clergy. One night, after Romanos had prayed to the Mother of God, she appeared to him in a dream, held out a piece of paper and told him to swallow it. On the following day, the Nativity of Christ, Romanos went to the ambon and, with an angelic voice, sang 'Today the Virgin...', which is still sung as the Kontakion of the Feast. All present were amazed at the completely unexpected beauty of the hymn and of Romanos' singing. St Romanos went on to compose more than a thousand Kontakia (which were once long hymns, not the short verses used in church

today). He is almost certainly the author of the sublime Akathist Hymn to the Mother of God, which has served as the model for all other Akathists. He reposed in peace, while still a deacon of the Great Church in Constantinople. Many of his hymns were inspired by the hymns of St Ephraim of Syria.

The influence of Middle Eastern music on the hymnography of the Church is incalculable. Many of those who established the form of the Church's music were Syrians: two noted examples are St Romanos and St John of Damascus, who composed the Octoechos, the Pascha service, and the Funeral Service. Their music was in turn modeled on the music of the Hebrew temple. The Byzantine musical tradition has descended without break from the music sung in Christ's time, and presumably by Christ Himself.

Our Holy Father Gregory the Choirmaster (Domestikos) of the Great Lavra (1355)

He was a cantor at the Great Lavra on Mt Athos. Once, on the eve of Theophany, he was inspired to sing the hymn O full of grace, thou who art the joy of all creation instead of the usual It is truly meet to bless thee during the Divine Liturgy. When he did this, the most holy Theotokos appeared to him, thanked him and gave him a gold coin as a sign of her favor. The coin is still kept at the Lavra. He reposed in peace. St Gregory's hymn has been sung since that time as part of the Divine Liturgy of St Basil.

Saint Remigius, Bishop of Rheims, Apostle to the Franks (533)

He was born in 438 in northern Gaul. After devoting himself for awhile to secular and sacred learning, he withdrew to a small house near Laon, to live in reclusion and prayer. But when a bishop was needed in Rheims, the clergy and people carried him off from his hermitage and made him their bishop. He was only twenty-two years old at the time.

The holy bishop soon became renowned throughout northern Gaul. He converted heretics, brought Arian heretics back to the Orthodox Faith, and cared for the many who suffered at the hands of barbarian marauders. Wherever he went, miracles attended him. He healed the sick and demonized and once, when a town was on fire, threw himself into the flames and quenched them. Birds would come to his table whenever he ate, and he would share his meal with them.

In 482 the young warrior Clovis became leader of the Frankish tribes in that region. Though he was a pagan, he knew and admired St Remigius, and was married to a Christian, St Clotilde (June 3). Once, when his army faced defeat by the Alemanii, Clovis prayed to 'the God of Clotilde and Remigius' and won a great victory. This answer to his prayers convinced him of the truth of the Christian Faith, and he asked St Remigius to instruct him. Two years later he gathered all his chieftains in Rheims to attend his baptism. The baptism was accompanied by many miracles, seen by all in attendance. Two of the king's sisters and three thousand of his lords and soldiers were baptized at the ceremony. This event is considered the birth of France as a Christian nation.

In great old age, St Remigius went blind, but miraculously recovered his

sight. He reposed in peace at the age of 105, immediately after serving the Divine Liturgy.

Ananias, Apostle of the Seventy
Venerable John Koukouzelis
Venerable Gregory of Mount Athos

Day 01-Oct-2023 Sunday

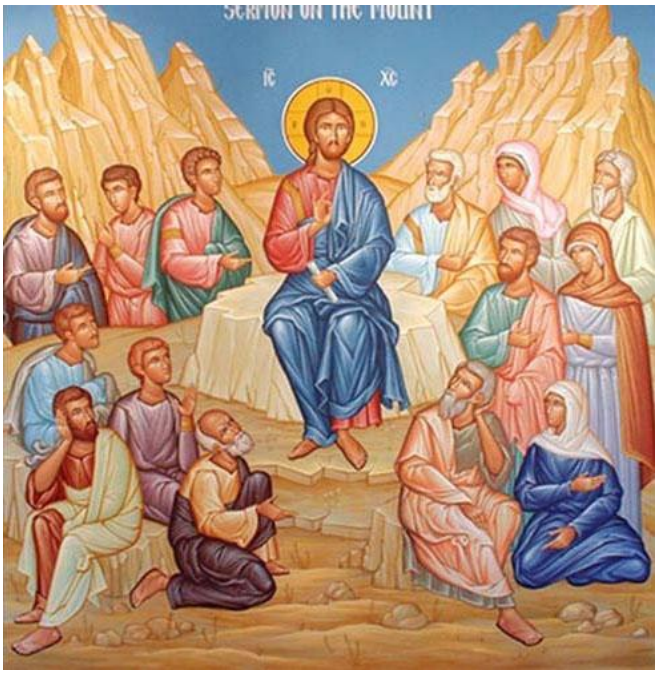
Fast Free

Gospel Reading: Love Your Enemies
2 Corinthians 11:31-12:9; Luke 6:31-36

31 The God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, he who is blessed unto the ages, knows that I do not lie.
32 In Damascus, the governor of King Aretas guarded the city in order to arrest me.
33 But I was let down in a basket along the wall through a window, and this is how I escaped from his hands.
12 Without a doubt, it is not profitable for me to boast, but I will now discuss visions and revelations from the Lord.
2 I know a man in Christ, who fourteen years ago, was caught up into the third heaven (whether [it was] in the body, I do not know, or whether out of the body, I do not know; God knows).
3 [Yes], I know such a man (whether in the body, or outside of the body, I do not know; God knows), 4 how he was caught up into Paradise, and heard ineffable words, which it is not lawful for anyone to utter.
5 On behalf of such a person, I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except in my weaknesses.
6 If my intention is to boast, I will not be foolish: I will speak the truth.
But now, I shall stop, so that no one may think more of me than what is seen in me or heard from me.
7 Because of the tremendous greatness of these revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan that torments me, so that I would not be too exalted.
Yes, I should not be too exalted! 8 Concerning this thing, I begged the Lord three times that it might depart from me, 9 but he replied to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.
And so, it is with joy that I would rather [find] glory in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest on me.

Gospel Reading: Love Your Enemies: Luke 6:31-36

31 As you would like others to do to you, do the same to them.
32 If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love



those who love them! 33 If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same! 34 If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive [back], what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive back as much.
35 But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing back. Then your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High, for he is kind [even] to the ungrateful and evil.
36 Therefore, be merciful, even as your Father is also merciful.

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING

'And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise" (Luke 6:31)
n the Gospel reading today, Jesus tells His disciples to follow what has become to be known as 'The Golden Rule", i.e. Do to others as you would have them do to you.
A concept which may seem obvious and yet so difficult for us to follow.
But Jesus tells us to take a deeper look at the Golden Rule, to take it a step further.
According to the Lord, it is not a matter of what goes around comes around but a matter of responding to the ungodly with God’s love.
In one of the rules, Christ instructs us to 'Love your enemies!' (Luk. 6:35). Loving our enemies goes against our natural reaction towards our enemies as human beings and is therefore difficult to accomplish.
Bishop Gerasimos, when preaching on this Gospel reading in 1992 in the seminary chapel in Boston said, 'Loving your enemies may really be too difficult for you, at least try not to hate them!' Trying to reach this helps us to reach selflessness and putting our desires to the side and exchanging it for goodness.
St Cyril of Alexandria calls this selfishness 'the natural law of self-love".
Man is by nature a social being.
He lives, moves, acts and develops within a society of human beings.
God created man in that way to not be alone upon the earth and created Eve, to be a helpmate for him.
In other words, God Himself created and then blessed the society of man to be in a communion of love, like He is in.
Our ancestors, the Greek philosophers, said: 'A man, who does not live with other fellow men, either has to be a god or crazy"! Man is a social creature because the Holy Trinity is also social.

God is Three: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
God is One in His Essence, but Three in His Hypostases or Persons (Hypostasis means the way of existence). Among the Three Persons an absolute and perfect harmonious relationship of love exists.
The Love of the Three Persons is mutual and it is expressed towards the world, especially towards man.
Love is from God, and anyone who loves his neighbour is from God and knows God.
He who does not have love, does not know God, because God is Love (1 John 4:7-8). He, who struggles to remain in the love towards his fellow man, partakes of the love of God and God dwells in the heart of that person who has love.
For this reason, if God has loved us so much, we also must love one another in a similar manner (1 John 4:11). Love is the connection link in our relationships with our fellow man.
The question of today's Gospel reading is: Do we love correctly? Is our love that love which God demands from us, pure and unconditional? Is our love distinguished from the worldly love, which is selfish and expects something in return? We must also give things without expecting anything back out of love and not just give to those who you know will give back the things you gave to them, even with interest.
Even sinners lend to sinners, so this is nothing special in Christ's eyes! This Gospel passage ties in with the Epistle reading where St Paul says, 'God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7) and that God will 'increase the fruits of your righteousness" (2 Cor. 9:10). God rewards us in many ways for our cheerful giving whether to our fellow human beings or to God and His Church.
Only then 'we become sons of the Most High (God)' (Luk. 6:35)! We do all these things for the glory of God and not to receive glory for ourselves.
We let go of our 'ego" to not let it dominate us.
This is exactly what the Lord means when He says: 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself" (Matt. 16:24). Miraculous things happen in our lives when we truly give ourselves and all of the defects of our human nature over to God.
St Paul said, 'I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). St John the Baptist said, 'He (Christ) must increase, but I must decrease.
He who comes from above is above all" (Joh. 3:23). This is the outlook we must take as Orthodox Christians.
If we give up our own will, and embrace God's will as our own, we will be able to follow the exhortation to love our enemies and to be merciful, even as our Father in Heaven is merciful (Luk. 6:36). Amen.

LOVING YOUR ENEMIES

St Siluan the Athonite

he soul cannot know peace unless she prays for her enemies.
The soul that has learned of God’s grace to pray, feels love and compassion for every created thing, and in particular for mankind, for whom the Lord suffered on the Cross, and His soul was heavy for every one of us.
The Lord taught me to love my enemies.
Without the grace of God we cannot love our enemies.
Only the Holy Spirit teaches love, and then even devils arouse our pity because they have fallen from good, and lost humility in God.
I beseech you, put this to the test.
When a man affronts you or brings dishonour on your head, or takes what is yours, or persecutes the Church, pray to the Lord, saying: 'O Lord, we are all Your creatures.
Have pity on Your servants and turn their hearts to repentance,' and you will be aware of grace in your soul.
To begin with, constrain your heart to love enemies, and the Lord, seeing your good will, will help you in all things, and experience itself will show you the way.
But the man who thinks with malice of his enemies has not God’s love within him, and does not know God.
If you will pray for your enemies, peace will come to you; but when you can love your enemies – know that a great measure of the grace of God dwells in you, though I do not say perfect grace as yet, but sufficient for salvation.
Whereas if you revile your enemies, it means there is an evil spirit living in you and bringing evil thoughts into your heart, for, in the words of the Lord, out of the heart proceed evil thoughts – or good thoughts.

Day 02-Oct-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

St Andrew the Fool for Christ (911)

St Andrew was bought as a slave by Theognostos,a wealthy citizen of Constantinople, during the reign of the Emperor Leo the Wise. Theognostos recognized Andrew's unusual ability and taught him to read and write. Despite this, Andrew, obeying a divine revelation, took up the ascesis of folly for Christ, behaving as a madman all day and secretly praying most of the night. His master endeavored to have him cured of his apparent madness, having prayers read over him in church, but to no avail. Finally he discharged Andrew, who thereafter lived in absolute poverty in Constantinople, clothing himself in rags and living on the bread given him by kindly Christians. Anything that he received, beyond that needed for bare survival, he gave to beggars, usually mocking and insulting them at the same time so as not to be thanked or praised for his deeds. Such was the wholeheartedness of his prayers that he was given grace to see angels and demons, to discern the secrets of others, thereby turning them from their sins. It was he who, with his disciple Epiphanius, saw the vision of the Protecting Veil of the Mother of God (see October 1). After a life of profound ascetic struggle, he reposed in peace.

Hieromartyr Cyprian and Virgin-Martyr Justina (304).

"Saint Justina, who was from Damascus, lived in virginity for the sake of Christ. Saint Cyprian, who was from Antioch, began as an initiate of magic and worshipper of the demons. A certain foolish young man who had been smitten with Justina's beauty hired Cyprian to draw her to love him; when Cyprian had used every demonic device he knew, and had failed, being repulsed by the power of Christ Whom Justina invoked, he understood the weakness of the demons and came to know the truth. Delivered from demonic delusion, he came to Christ and burned all his books of magic, was baptized, and later ascended the episcopal throne in his country. Later, he and Justina were arrested by the Count of Damascus, and having endured many torments at his hands, they were sent finally to Diocletian in Nicomedia, where they were beheaded in the year 304." (Great Horologion)

St Cassian the Greek, Wonderworker of Uglich (1504)

In 1473, Princess Sophia Paleologos came to Russia with a large retinue to marry Prince Ivan III. One of this retinue was a certain nobleman named Constantine, a relative of the last Byzantine Emperor, Constantine XI Paleologos. Constantine entered into the service of Archbishop Joasaph of Rostov, and in 1489 went with him on his retirement to the Monastery of St Therapont at White Lake. Constantine himself had no plans to become a monk; but on his first night at the monastery St Martinian (January 12) appeared to him, exhorting him to renounce the world immediately. Constantine reported his vision to the Archbishop, who confirmed its authenticity, and Constantine was tonsured a monk with the name Cassian.

The new monk entered into the ascetic struggle with fervor: though he had spent his life as a prince, he gladly undertook the lowliest tasks and the most onerous obedience. At the encouragement of his friend St Nilus of Sora (Nil Sorsky, May 7), he took up a hermit's life by the River Uchma in the Uglich district. In time various disciples gathered around him, and St Cassian, against his own will, became the head of a skete. His teachings to his disciples always emphasized obedience, care for the poor, and prayer for the departed. He reposed in peace.

Holy Martyrs David and Constantine, Princes of Georgia

Day 02-Oct-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Readings of the day: Ephesians 4:25-32; Luke 3:19-22

25 Therefore, putting away what is false, speak the truth to each other, for we are members of one another.
26 'Be angry, and do not sin.
b Do not let the sun go down on your anger 27 and do not leave any room for the devil.
28 Those who used to steal should steal no more, but rather work hard, even with their own hands to do what is good, so that they may have something to give to those who have need.
29 Do not allow any decadent speech to come out from your mouth, only what is good to build up as is needed, in a way that gives grace to those who hear.
30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by which you were sealed for the day of redemption.
31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, shouting and slander be put away from you, along with evil thoughts.
32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other just as God also forgave you in Christ.

Gospel Reading:

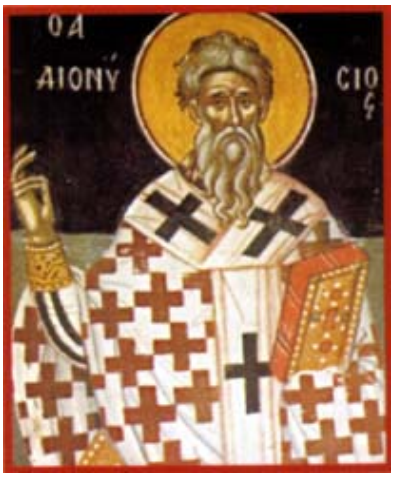
19 But Herod the tetrarch, being reproved by him for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things which he had done, 20 added this also to them all, that he shut up John in prison.
21 Now it happened, after all the people were baptized, that Jesus was also baptized.
As he was praying, heaven was opened, 22 and the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily form as a dove on him.
A voice came out of heaven, saying 'You are my beloved Son! In you I am well pleased.

Day 03-Oct-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Venerable John the Chozebite
Saint Hesychius the Chorebite

Hieromartyr Dionysius the Areopagite (96)



Saint Dionysius, who came of a rich and noble family, lived in Athens at the time of the Apostles. On account of the wisdom and virtue pagan learning afforded him, he was chosen one of the nine counsellors of the Areopagus, the high court and parliament of the city. As such, it was he who invited the great Apostle Paul, whom the Holy Spirit had brought to the city, to proclaim the good tidings of Salvation on the Areopagus. From the height of this rock overlooking the city, the simple tent-maker pulled to pieces the sophistries of the Athenian philosophers, and clearly showed that the *unknown God*, whom their unassisted reason had given them a vague notion of, was *the Lord of heaven and earth, who made the world and everything in it, and who does not live in temples made by hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life, and breath and every thing* (Acts 17:23 25). He told them that man is made in the image of God and is called upon to share the divine life in the very Son of God, Jesus Christ, who has taken our flesh has risen from the dead and will come to judge the world. Most of the audience mocked Saint Paul on hearing about the Resurrection of the dead, since the false wisdom of this world had completely darkened their minds. Even so, the hearts of several among them, including Saint Dionysius and Saint Hierotheus, were touched by these words of eternal life, and they believed. When Saint Paul spoke of the Saviour's Passion and of the portents that occurred at his death, Dionysius recalled the solar eclipse, inexplicable to astronomers, that had happened years before when he was in Egypt completing his studies among learned men at Heliopolis. 'Either God is suffering', he had cried out then, 'or this is the end of the world!' This event prepared Dionysius and his master Hierotheus to recognize Him who overcomes the laws of nature when He so wills; so they listened eagerly to the holy Apostle's teaching and asked him for Baptism.

After some time, Saint Paul departed to endure new tribulations, and left Saint Hierotheus as Bishop of Athens. Like the eagle that can look directly upon the brightness of the sun, Hierotheus was able to enter into the mysteries of God. But he wrote little, choosing rather to instruct his disciple Dionysius orally concerning the revelations beyond all speech that God granted him. On Hierotheus' death, Dionysius became Bishop of Athens in his stead. God enabled him by His grace to put into writing the sublime teachings of his masters about the unutterable boundlessness of the divine Nature (to which none but the negative terms of apophatic theology are applicable) and about the unfathomable riches of His revelation through His Names and Energies that is the sum of affirmative theology. He described how the *sensible* world (that perceived by our senses) and the *intelligible* world (that apprehended by the illumined intellect) are united to God in a magnificently ordered hierarchy. He explained how the ecclesiastical hierarchy, from the bishop to the monk, manifests upon earth the nine orders of angels, and how the divine light is distributed to each person according to his degree of purification. Although some people have accused Saint Dionysius of borrowing the terminology of the Neoplatonic philosophers, the Orthodox Church, enlightened by his divine teaching, believes rather that it is the latter who have borrowed his language, albeit without being able to show, as does the Saint, that He who is beyond every name and all being and who dwells in the *darkness more radiant than light*, has appeared in the flesh so as to make us partakes of His light.

Saint Dionysius attained such heights of divine contemplation that he was accounted worthy of being numbered among the Apostles, and was wondrously transported to Jerusalem for the entombment of the Mother of God. On his return to Athens, he devoted himself for some time to converting the pagans and to guiding his spiritual flock. Towards the end of Nero's reign, he visited Rome to give his master, Saint Paul, an account of his missionary activity. He was present at Paul's martyrdom and then returned to Greece.

On a later visit to Rome, Saint Dionysius and his disciples, the priest Rusticus and the deacon Eleutherius, were commissioned by Saint Clement, the Bishop of Rome, to preach the Gospel in Gaul.+ When he had preached the word of truth in a good many places, Dionysius settled in Paris, which was then a small town sunk in the darkness of ignorance and paganism. He built a church there, in which he served the holy Mysteries and proclaimed the great works of God. He worked many miracles so that, in a while, the number of his disciples increased, and they set out to spread the holy Gospel in Britain and as far as Spain.

The renown of Saint Dionysius aroused the envy of the Devil, who gave the Emperor Domitian to understand that the Greek bishop who was preaching a

new god was trying to provoke disorder and revolt. The imperial officers tried in vain to persuade Dionysius and his companions to deny God, for whom they lived and wished to die, and so, on being sentenced to beheading, the Martyrs were overjoyed. Not only did God give the holy Bishop the grace of knowledge and of teaching, but He also wanted to show in his martyrdom that, by faith, Christians have overcome death. So when Dionysius had been beheaded he stood up, to the amazement of all, took his head in his hands and walked thus for two miles until he met Catula, a godly woman, to whom he gave this precious relic. Saint Dionysius' skull is now venerated in the Monastery of Dochiariou on Mount Athos, to which it was given by the Emperor Alexius Comnenus in the eleventh century.

+This account of a missionary journey by St Dionysius the Areopagite and of his martyrdom outside Paris really refers to St Dionysius the first Bishop of Paris (9 Oct.). The confusion of the two saints probably occurred when a manuscript of the writings attributed to St Dionysius the Areopagite was brought to France by an embassy from Constantinople to the court of Louis the Pious (827). The legend was taken up by an unknown hagiographer who modelled his account on a panegyric composed by St Michael the Syncellus (*c*. 834), in which the date of the martyrdom is transferred from the reign of Domitian to that of Trajan. St Symeon Metaphrastes then included this in his Menology.
Source: The Synaxarion: The Lives of the Saints of the Orthodox Church. Volume One, Introduction, September, October. Holy Convent of The Annunciation of Our Lady, Ormylia (Chalkidike), 1998.

Holy Hieromartyr Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria, and his disciples (258)

He was a disciple of Origen and became a priest in Alexandria. He became Bishop of Alexandria in 247, serving not only his own see but the whole Church with fervor and compassion. He traveled to Rome to fight the Novatian schisms that disturbed the Body of Christ at that time, and mediated in the dispute between St Cyprian (September 16) and the Pope.

During the reign of Valerian, the new Governor of Alexandra, Emilianus, summoned St Dionysius, along with a group of his clergy, and demanded that they renounce Christ. When all stood firm in the Faith, he exiled them to the remote village of Kephro. But Christians flocked to the village to seek out the holy Bishop, and many pagans in the region were converted by him — so that soon the town was more nearly a Christian mission than a place of exile. When Emilianus learned of this, he exiled the Bishop and his disciples far into the wilderness, where they lived amidst terrible sufferings and hardships for more than twelve years. Saint Dionysius and his deacons Gaius and Faustus all died there; Eusebius the deacon and Maximus the priest eventually escaped. Eusebius became Bishop of Laodicea; Maximus, like his spiritual father, became Bishop of Alexandria.

St John the Chozebite, Bishop of Caesarea in Palestine (532)

He came from a prominent family in Egypt, and was brought up among the Monophysites. He became a monk in his youth, and went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem. When he attempted to enter the Church of the Resurrection to venerate the Precious Cross, an unseen power prevented him from entering. The next night he heard a voice telling him in his sleep that those who do not embrace the Orthodox faith are unworthy to worship the holy Cross of the Savior. John awoke and hurried to the church where, in tears, he accepted and confessed the entire Orthodox Faith. After returning to Egypt he settled in Palestine, living alone in a cave in the isolated region called Chozeba. There he lived in solitude until one day a couple brought their son, possessed by an evil spirit. They had been sent to John by Ananias, a well-known ascetic of Palestine. John considered himself unworthy to pray for the casting out of demons, so he prayed in the name of Ananias, and the boy was healed. Thenceforth, John's wonderworking powers became known, and many made the difficult journey to his cave for the healing of spiritual and bodily ailments. Later John, much against his will, was consecrated Bishop of Caesarea; but he was unable to tolerate the cares of episcopal life and fled again to the desert, where he spent the rest of his life. The faithful continued to visit him in great numbers, and many signs and wonders were worked through his prayers. He reposed in peace at a great age.

Day 03-Oct-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free
Readings of the day: Ephesians 5:20-26; Luke 3:23-4:1
20 Always giving thanks for everything in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, even to God the Father.
21 [Finally], be in mutual subjection in the fear of God.
c Wives, Husbands, Christ and the Church
22 Wives, be subject to your own husbands as [you are] to the Lord.
23 For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the Church, being himself the savior of the body.
24 As the Church is subject to Christ, wives should likewise be subject to their own husbands in everything.
25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her
26 in order to sanctify her, having purified her by the washing of water with the word,

Gospel Reading:
23 Jesus himself, when he began to teach, was about thirty years old, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli, 24 the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph,
25 the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai, 26 the son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Joseph, the son of Judah,
27 the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri, 28 the son of Melchi, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmodam, the son of Er, 29 the son of Jose, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, 30 the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonan, the son of Eliakim, 31 the son of Melea, the son of Menan, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David, 32 the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Salmon, the son of Nahshon, 33 the son of Amminadab, the son of Aram,the son of Joram, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, 34 the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, 35 the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, 36 /the son of Cainan/, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech,

37 the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of
Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan, 38 the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of
Adam, the son of God.
4 1Full of the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit
into the wilderness.

Day 04-Oct-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Hieromartyr Hierotheos, Bishop of Athens (1st c.)

He was probably the first Bishop of Athens, ordained by the Holy Apostle Paul himself. St Dionysius (see October 3) describes St Hierotheos as his teacher and friend "after Paul." With St Dionysius, St Hierotheos was miraculously brought by the power of the Holy Spirit to be present with the Apostles at the Dormition of the Theotokos. He reposed in peace.

Our Holy Father Ammon of Egypt (4th c)

"Our holy Father Ammon's parents died in his childhood. He was brought up by an uncle, who made him marry when he was still very young. On the night of his wedding, as soon as he and his wife retired to the bridal chamber, Ammon took up the holy Scriptures and read the passage in the Epistle to the Corinthians where the Apostle speaks of the disadvantages of marriage because of all the troubles and cares that come with it, while virgins consecrated to the Lord can devote themselves without distraction to prayer and to spiritual labour. Both spouses took the following words literally: From now on, let those who have wives be as though they had none... and those who deal with the world, as though they had no dealings with it (1 Cor. 7:29,31). They decided to remain in their virginity and to retire together to a desert place where they could give themselves over to prayer and fasting. They set out for the mountain of Nitria, some way from Alexandria, and settled in a little hut there. But, living together as man and woman, they soon realized the inexpedience of tempting nature head-on and of provoking the attacks of demons. They parted company, therefore, each to live separately in ascesis. Ammon never used wine or oil but lived only on dry bread that he ate every two or three days.

"His manner of life was pleasing to the Lord, and a great many brethren who wanted to embrace the monastic life soon came to join him. When a new aspirant arrived, Ammon would immediately let him have his own cell with everything in it, and the other brethren would secretly bring provisions to the newcomer or whatever else might be useful. This showed that fraternal love was first among the laws observed in this ever-growing brotherhood. In a few years, under the direction of Ammon, the desert of Nitria was transformed into a veritable city. Some of the brethren now wanted to build their cells at a distance where they could live in greater solitude, so when one day Saint Antony the Great came to visit him, Abba Ammon asked his advice about the place to choose. At the ninth hour, after taking a scanty meal together, they

walked in the desert until sunset, when they set up a cross at the place they had reached, so that those who wanted to could build their cells there with the blessing of the two Elders. 'In this way,' Abba Antony said, 'the brethren coming from Nitria, after a meal at the ninth hour, to see those who are here, will meet them at this moment. And if those who leave here to go to Nitria do the same, they will not lose their hesychia (stillness).' This was how the desert of Kellia ('the Cells') came to be established almost twelve miles from Nitria. More than six hundred monks were soon living there, each in his own cell.

"Saint Ammon and Saint Antony were united in a deep spiritual friendship. When Abba Ammon gave up his soul in peace to the Lord at Nitria, Antony, far away on his mountain, broke off the conversation he was having with some monks and, in ecstasy, saw the soul of Ammon going up to Heaven accompanied by the joyful hymns of a multitude of angels. Among other words inspired by the Holy Spirit, Saint Ammon said, 'Bear with everyone as God bears with you'." (Synaxarion)

Saint Stefan Stiljanovic

Holy Martyrs Domnina and her daughters Berenice and Prosdoke

Day 04-Oct-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Ephesians 5:25-33; Luke 4:1-15
25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her 26 in order to sanctify her, having purified her by the washing of water with the word,
27 so that he might present the Church to himself in glory, without any spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and flawless.
28 In the same way, a husband should love his wife as his [own] body.
He who loves his own wife loves himself!
29 No man ever hates his own body but feeds it and cares for it, as the Lord also does for the Church.
30 Yes, we are members of his body, his very flesh and bones!
31 This is why a man will leave his father and mother and will be joined to his wife; and the two will become one flesh.
32 This is a great mystery: I speak concerning Christ and the Church.
33 Now concerning you: each one of you must also love his own wife even as his own self; and the wife must respect her husband.

Gospel Reading:
4 The temptation in the desert Full of the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness.
2 For forty days, he was tempted by the devil.
He ate nothing in those days and afterward, when they were completed, he was hungry.
3 The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread!' 4 Jesus answered him, saying, 'It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.
5 Leading him up on a high place, the devil showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.
6 The devil said to him, 'I will give you all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me and I give it to whomever I want.
7 If you therefore will express adoration to me, it will all be yours.
8 Jesus answered him, 'Get behind me Satan!e For it is written, 'You shall express adoration to the Lord your God, and to him only shall you offer divine service.
9 The devil led him to Jerusalem, set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said

to him, 'If you are the Son of God, cast yourself down from here, 10 for it is written,
He will put his angels in charge of you, to guard you; 11 and, They will carry you
with their hands, for fear that you may dash your foot against a stone.
12 In reply, Jesus said to him, 'It has been said, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your
God.
13 When the devil had completed every temptation, he departed from Jesus until
another time.
The Lord's ministry in Galilee and his rejection in Nazareth 14 Jesus returned in
the power of the Spirit into Galilee, and news about him spread through all the
surrounding area.
15 He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.

Day 05-Oct-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Holy Martyr Charitina of Amissos (304)

She was the handmaid (according to the Great Horologion) or adopted daughter (according to the Prologue) of an eminent Roman citizen named Claudius, during the reign of Diocletian. She was betrayed as a Christian to the governor Dometian, before whom she fearlessly confessed her faith. After she had endured many cruel tortures, the governor sent some dissolute youths to rape her. Having prayed to be spared this dishonor, she was permitted to give up her soul to God.

† Holy Hierarchs of Moscow Peter (1326), Alexis (1378), Jonas (1461), Macarius (1563), Philip (1569), Hermogenes (1612), Philaret (1867), Innocent (1879), and Tikhon (1925)

This Feast of the Hierarchs of Moscow was established during the reign of Tsar Theodore and Patriarch Job in the year 1596. All of them are commemorated individually as well as on this day. Only Sts Peter, Alexis, Jonas and Philip are specifically mentioned in the Menaion service, but other holy hierarchs of Moscow have been added to the commemoration over the years.

Our Holy Mother Methodia of Kimolos (1865)

Saint Methodia was born in 1865 on the island of Kimolos in the Cyclades to pious and God-fearing parents. From childhood she wanted to devote herself entirely to the service of God and Holy Church. She set at a distance all worldly pleasures, and delighted only in what profits the soul. Contrary to her own wishes, her parents married her to a sailor from Chios but, shortly after their wedding, her husband was drowned on a voyage to Asia Minor. She mourned his loss but took it as a sign from God to do what, in the depths of her heart, she had always desired. She received the holy angelic Habit, taking the name Methodia. Then, *as a hart longs for flowing streams* (Ps. 41), she made haste to leave the world and shut herself in a little cell situated near a fortress where, sheltered from all care, she could give herself over unceasingly to divine contemplation. She never left this little refuge except when love of neighbour constrained her to do so. She spent the whole day in prayer and meditation and, after resting a while, kept vigil all night long with

tears, as she contemplated the heavenly Bridegroom with the spiritual eyes of her soul. She observed a strict fast every day of the week save Saturday and Sunday, when she left her retreat to communicate in the divine Mysteries at church. She received no visitors during Great Lent, and remained in seclusion until Easter. Her ascetic struggles, and the graces that God granted her in return, soon became widely known, not only all over the island but also in the surrounding area. To avoid temptation, she would accept only women visitors. Those who came to her for the needs of the soul or practical advice always returned home full of joy at having found a true handmaid of God. She would instruct them in the ways of repentance and of the evangelic virtues, and give them some oil from the lamp that was always burning in her cell, as a sign of the consolation obtained for everyone by her unceasing prayers. She wrought many healings and, having fought *the good fight* (2 Tim. 4:7), fell asleep in peace to be with the Lord, in her forty-third year, on 5 October 1908.

Source: The Synaxarion: The Lives of the Saints of the Orthodox Church. Volume One, Introduction, September, October. Holy Convent of The Annunciation of Our Lady, Ormylia (Chalkidike), 1998.

Eudokimos the Unknown of Mount Athos
Venerable Damian, Jeremiah and Matthew of the Kiev Caves

Day 05-Oct-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Ephesians 5:33-6:9; Luke 4:16-22

33 6 Now concerning you: each one of you must also love his own wife even as
his own self; and the wife must respect her husband.
6 Children and parents Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.
2'Honor your father and mother,' which is the first commandment with a promise:
3'that it may be well with you, and you may live long on the earth.
a 4Fathers, do not drive your children to anger, but nurture them in the discipline
and instruction of the Lord.
Servants and masters 5Servants, be obedient to those who are your masters
according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, with deep loyalty,c as to Christ.
6 Do not serve only when eyes are on you in order to please human masters, but
as servants of Christ.
Accomplish God's will from the heart; 7 serve with a good attitude, as if you were
serving the Lord and not men.
8 Know that for whatever good we do, we shall receive the same in return from the
Lord, no matter if we are slave or free.
9 You masters, do likewise to them: do not resort to threats but recognized that
you both have the same Master in heaven, and there is no discrimination with him.

Gospel Reading:

16 He came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up.
As was his custom, he entered into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood
up to read.
17 The scroll of the prophet Isaias (Isaiah) was handed to him.
He opened the book, and found the place where it was written: 18 The Spirit of the
Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach Good News to the poor.
He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim release to the captives,
recovery of sight to the blind, to deliver those who are crushed,c 19 and to
proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.
20 He closed the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down.
The eyes of all in the synagogue were fastened on him.
21 He began to tell them, 'Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.
22 All testified about him and marveled at the gracious words which came out of
his mouth; and they said, 'Is this not Joseph's son?'

Day 06-Oct-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Apostle Thomas

One of the Twelve Apostles, he was a Galilean by birth. His name means "twin." The twentieth chapter of St John's Gospel describes how, when he doubted the appearance of the Risen Lord, Christ appeared to him again, saying "Reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing," at which Thomas cried out "My Lord and my God!" Through this one event the Holy Scriptures attest that Christ is risen bodily, not merely as a spirit, as some heresies claim; and that He is in fact God. After Pentecost, St Thomas proclaimed the Gospel in the East, and established the Christian faith as far as India, where the small remnant of the ancient Church still traces its foundation to him. According to some accounts he met a martyr's end; according to others, he reposed in peace. St John Chrysostom mentions that his tomb was in Edessa in Syria; his relics may have been translated there from India in the fourth century.

Venerable New Martyr Makarios the Righteous of Chios
Kendeas the Wonderworker of Cyprus

Day 06-Oct-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Ephesians 6:18-24; Luke 4:22-30
Unceasing prayer 18 Pray at all times in [the] spirit with intercessions and requests; never get tired of this and persevere in your requests for all the saints.
19 Pray also for me, so that I may be given an opportunity to proclaim with boldness the mystery of the Good News.
20 For this cause, I am an ambassador in chains; so pray that I may proclaim it boldly, as I should.
21I also want you to know my affairs, how I am doing.
Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything.
22 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, to let you know about our condition and to comfort your hearts.
23 Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
24 May grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ, even with unfading love.
Amen.
Gospel reading:

22 All testified about him and marveled at the gracious words which came out of his mouth; and they said, 'Is this not Joseph's son?' 23 He said to them, 'Without doubt, you will quote me this proverb, 'Physician, heal yourself! Do also [right] here in your hometown whatever we have heard that was done at Capernaum!" 24 Jesus continued, 'Amen, I tell you that no prophet is acceptable in his hometown.
25 But I tell you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elias (Elijah), when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came all over the land.
26 Elias (Elijah) was sent to none of them, except to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow.
27 There were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed, except Naaman, the Syrian.
28 As they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with anger.
29 They rose up, threw Jesusg out of the city, and led him to the edge of the hill that their city was built on in order to push him off the cliff.
30 But passing through their midst, he went his way.

Day 07-Oct-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Holy Martyrs Sergius and Bacchus (296/303)

"These holy and wonderful martyrs and heroes of the Christian faith were at first nobles at the court of the Emperor Maximian. The Emperor himself valued them greatly for their courage, wisdom and zeal, but, when he heard that these great nobles of his were Christians, his love for them turned to fury. And once, when there was a great offering of sacrifices to idols, the Emperor summoned Sergius and Bacchus to offer sacrifice together with him, and they openly refused to obey him in this. Beside himself with anger, the Emperor ordered that their robes, rings and marks of eminence be stripped from them and they be dressed in women's clothing. He then put iron yokes on their necks and led them thus through the streets of Rome, to be mocked by each and all. The Emperor then sent them to Asia, to Antiochus the governor, for torture. Antiochus had achieved his distinguished rank with the help of Sergius and Bacchus, who had at one time recommended him to the Emperor. When Antiochus began to urge them to deny Christ and save themselves from dishonourable suffering and death, the two saints replied: 'Both honour and dishonour, both life and death — all are one to him who seeks the heavenly Kingdom.' Antiochus threw Sergius into prison and ordered that Bacchus be tortured first. The servants took turns beating holy Bacchus until his whole body was broken into fragments. His holy spirit went forth from his broken and bloodstained body and was borne to the Lord by angels. St Bacchus suffered in the town of Varvallis. Then holy Sergius was led out. Iron shoes studded with nails were put on his feet, and he was driven out into the Syrian town of Resapha, and there beheaded with the sword. His soul went to Paradise where, together with his friend Bacchus, he received the wreath of immortal glory from Christ his King and Lord. These two glorious knights suffered for the Christian faith in about 303." (Prologue) The Great Horologion gives 296 as the date of their repose. One of the most beautiful churches in Constantinople, still standing, is dedicated to Sts Sergius and Bacchus.

Holy Hieromartyr Polychronius (4th c.)

The son of peasants, he was known from his childhood for his piety and asceticism. Once, by his prayers, a spring of water sprang up near his village,

where it was needed for the town's survival. When he came of age, Polychronius went to work in some vineyards near Constantinople. Even though he labored all day, he would eat only every two or three days. The master of the vineyard, seeing his strict and prayerful way of life, gave him a large sum of money and said 'Man of God, go home and pray for me.' With the money, Polychronius built a church, settled near it, and a few years later was ordained to be a priest in the church he had built. Polychronius appeared at the First Ecumenical Council in 325 as a fervent defender of Orthodoxy. Because of this, some Arian heretics determined to take revenge. One day, after the death of the Emperor Constantine, the Arians attacked Polychronius at the altar as he was celebrating the Divine Liturgy, thus mingling his blood with the very blood of the Savior.

The Ninety-nine Fathers of Crete (date unknown)

Saint John the Hermit and thirty-five companions lived in Egypt, but took ship as a group for Cyprus in order to practice ascesis in exile. At Cyprus they met a party of thirty-nine others who also sought to live the ascetic life more fully, and the two groups joined. "In order that these ascetics, too, might taste of the graces of voluntary exile" (Synaxarion), they travelled to Attalia in Pamphylia. There, twenty-four more monks joined them, so that their company now numbered ninety-nine. (This number was ordained by God, so that Christ Himself, their Head, would complete their number at one hundred.) After some time they took ship again for Crete, where they lived in two caves in a remote, deserted area, living only on the plants that grew wild there.

Saint John sought his brothers' blessing to live as a hermit. On the day of his departure they prayed that they all might repose on the day of John's death, and enter together into the Kingdom of God. John's asceticism was so severe that after awhile he could no longer walk, but crawled from his cave to gather the small quantities of food he allowed himself. A shepherd, seeing him from a distance, thought that he was some animal, and shot him with an arrow. Finding the dying John, the shepherd was stricken with horror and grief, and threw himself at the hermit's feet, begging forgiveness. The saint only lived long enough to give the young man his pardon and blessing before surrendering his soul to God. The prayer of his ninety-eight brethren was mysteriously granted: between the third and seventh hour of that day, they all, one after another, fell asleep in peace.

Day 07-Oct-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 15:39-45; Luke 4:31-36

39 Not all flesh is alike: there is human nature, animal flesh and also the nature of
fish and birds.
40 There are also heavenly bodies, and earthly bodies; but the glory of the
heavenly differs from that of the earthly.
41 There is the glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of
the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory.
42 This is comparable to the resurrection of the dead: something is sown in
corruption but raised in incorruption.
43 It is sown in dishonor; it is then raised in glory.
It is sown in weakness then raised in power.
44 It is sown as a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.
There is a natural body just as there is a spiritual body.
45 And so, it is written, 'The first man, Adam, became a living soul.
e The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

Gospel Reading:

31 Jesus came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee.
He was teaching the people on the Sabbath day, 32 and they were astonished at
his teaching because his word was with authority.
33 In the synagogue, there was a man who had a spirit of an unclean demon, and
he cried out with a loud voice, 34 'Ah! what have we to do with you, Jesus of
Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know you who you are: the Holy One
of God!' 35 Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be silent, and come out of him!' When the
demon had thrown the man among them, he came out of him, having done him no
harm.
36 Amazement came on all, and they spoke together, one with another, saying,
'What is this word? For he commands the unclean spirits with authority and power,
and they come out!'

Day 08-Oct-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Our Holy Mother Pelagia (461)

Saint Pelagia lived at Antioch in the second half of the fifth century, where she was the best-known harlot of that great city. Her devotion to dancing and unchaste pleasures made her a great fortune that she spent entirely on adorning her body with costly raiment and voluptuous perfumes, in order to attract new victims into her net. She had many slaves and servants who escorted her whenever, seated in a luxurious chariot, she went about the city.

One day, the Archbishop of Antioch invited Nonnus, the holy Bishop of Edessa (10 Nov.), to address some of his bishops in the Church of St Julian, for he was a man of inspired utterance, able to bring those who heard him to repentance and love of virtue. It so happened that Pelagia, with her usual retinue, passed by the doors of the church near where Nonnus was speaking. While the other bishops and pious folk averted their eyes, Nonnus looked upon the women and wept, saying to them, ‘Woe unto us lazy and careless people, who will have to give account at the day of Judgement for not having been as zealous and careful to please God as this poor women has been to adorn her body for fleeting pleasure!’ And he prayed fervently to the Lord for her conversion.

Pelagia was among those who listened to Nonnus as he preached on the holy Gospel at Divine Service the next day. What he said about the last Judgement and everlasting punishment struck her like a rapier thrust to the heart and awoke in her a love for the heavenly Bridegroom, which is the only true love. On her return to her palace, she wrote to the holy Bishop asking him to receive her and not to scorn her for her depravity, if he were a true disciple of Him who came to call, *not the righteous but sinners to repentance* (Matt. 9:13). Nonnus answered that if she had truly resolved to repent, she should

come to church and confess her offences before the whole congregation of clergy and people. Pelagia seized the opportunity and hastened to the church, forgetful of all her pride and pomp. She threw herself at the feet of the Bishop and begged him for regeneration to eternal life in holy Baptism, lest the Devil and habit draw her back again to sinful ways. The whole city of Antioch rejoiced at the baptism of Pelagia. A nun called Romana undertook to guide her first steps in spiritual warfare and the life of repentance. And so, by prayer and the sign of the Cross, Pelagia overcame the temptations to return to her sinful life, that were not slow to make their appearance.

Some days after her baptism, she gave away all her wealth to the poor and freed her slaves. Then, free of every worldly tie and clad like a poor man in rough clothing, she departed for the Holy Land, unknown to all, to lead the ascetic life on the Mount of Olives. She remained for many years in a little cell, struggling each day against the passions that were deeply rooted in her body, and devoting all the care she had once taken over her outward appearance to adorning her soul for everlasting life. Despite her solitary life, Pelagia's valiant spiritual struggle became well-known to the other ascetics of Palestine; they did not know, however, that she was in fact a woman. When the holy penitent gave up her soul in peace to God, all the monks thereabouts gathered to venerate her holy relics. And they gave great glory to God when a disciple of Nonnus told them the true story of Pelagia's life, for it teaches all who are engulfed in the darkness of sin not to despair, but to set out courageously on the road of repentance.

Source: The Synaxarion: The Lives of the Saints of the Orthodox Church. Volume One, Introduction, September, October. Holy Convent of The Annunciation of Our Lady, Ormylia (Chalkidike), 1998.

Apolytikion

The image of God, was faithfully preserved in you, O Mother. For you took up the Cross and followed Christ. By Your actions you taught us to look beyond the flesh for it passes, rather to be concerned about the soul which is immortal. Wherefore, O Holy Pelagia, your soul rejoices with the angels.

Saint Thaïs the Repentant Harlot (4th c.)

She lived in Alexandria, where, when she was seventeen, her own mother placed her in a brothel, where due to her great beauty she was able to amass some wealth. Saint Serapion (March 21), hearing about Thaïs and her way of life, was moved by God to try to convert her. He dressed himself as a soldier, found her, gave her a gold piece, and went with her to her room. When the door was shut, he put aside his tunic, revealing his monastic robe, and asked if he might speak with her. With tears he told her of the doom that awaits

sinners, and of the infinite mercy of God, who desires that all should be saved and welcomes every repentant sinner. Thaïs, her heart melted by his words, ran to the public square, burned all the fine clothes and possessions that she had acquired through her trade, and went with Serapion to a women's monastery. There he instructed her to stay secluded in her cell, beseeching God's mercy constantly and only eating every other day; she was to do this until she was instructed otherwise. Thaïs lived in this way for three years, with such zeal that she amazed all her monastic sisters. Meanwhile St Serapion went to St Anthony the Great to ask him if God had accepted Thaïs' repentance. Saint Anthony and his brethren spent a night in prayer and received a vision in which they were assured that Thaïs had been found worthy of God's mercy. Returning to the monastery, Serapion made the repentant Saint leave her cell, though by now she only wished to spend her life in repentant prayer. After spending only fifteen days in the common life of the monastery, the holy Thaïs reposed in peace.

Pelagia the Virgin-martyr of Antioch

Ignatius the New Martyr

Day 08-Oct-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Gospel Reading: Parable of the Sower
Galatians 2:16-20; Luke 8:5-15

16 Yet knowing that no one is justified by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, we believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law.
17 But if, even though we desired to be justified in Christ, we were found to be sinners, does that mean that Christ is a servant of sin? Certainly not! 18 Indeed, if I build up again those things which I [once] destroyed, I show that I am breaking the law.
19 For I, through the law, died to the law, so that I might live to God.
20 I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.
I now live this life in the flesh, but I live [it] by faith in the Son of God who loved me and who gave himself up for me.

Gospel Reading: Parable of the Sower Luke 8:5-15

5 'A farmer went out to sow his seed.
As he was sowing, some [seed] fell along the wayside; it was trampled under foot, and the birds of the sky devoured it.
6 Other seed fell on the rock, and as soon as it grew, it withered away because it had no moisture.
7 Other fell among the thorns, and the thorns grew with it, and choked it.
8 Other fell into the good ground, grew, and brought forth fruit a hundred times.
As he said this, he exclaimed, 'Let anyone with ears to hear listen!' 9 Then his disciples asked him, 'What does this parable mean?' 10 Jesus replied, 'To you it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God, but to the rest, [it is given] in parables, so that 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.
a 11 Now, this what the parable means: The seed is the word of God.
12 Those along the wayside are those who hear.
Then, the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they may not believe and be saved.
13 Those on the rock are those who receive the word with joy when they hear.

But they have no root; they believe for a while, then fall away in time of temptation.
14 What fell among the thorns is those who have heard, and as they go on their way, they are choked with worries, wealth, and the pleasures of life; and they bring no fruit to maturity.
15 As for the seed that fell in the rich soil, this is those who have heard the word with an honest and good heart, who retain it and bring forth fruit with endurance.

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING:

In the second century the Holy Martyr Justin wrote his account of Christians coming together for the Divine Liturgy – the Eucharist – in which he says: 'On Sunday we have a common assembly of all our members, whether they live in the city or the outlying districts.
The recollections of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as there is time.
When the reader has finished, the president of the assembly speaks to us; he urges us to imitate the examples of virtue we have heard in the readings.
Then we all stand up together and pray.
' From what the Gospels record and the Holy Apostle Paul confirms, particularly in his First Letter to the Corinthians (chapter 11), it is abundantly clear that what the Lord had revealed and decreed should be observed was faithfully followed by the Apostolic Church, and so to the present day.
In today's reading and in the strong language the Holy Apostle often uses he warns 'child Titus" against succumbing to the constant temptation to enter into time wasting and fruitless arguments 'which are unprofitable and useless.
' He is not decrying learning and education but more advising against becoming overzealous like those Our Lord referred to as 'straining out gnats and swallowing camels" (see, Matt. 23). Today's reading from the Holy Gospel contains one of the best-known parables, in which Jesus gives what seems a very understandable picture of an agricultural or gardening practice, the sowing of seed from which growth and harvest is hoped for.
It is a fairly simple illustration in the familiar parable form and yet his disciples could not grasp the meaning and Jesus had to repeat the parable explaining what was meant.
In essence, it is only when good soil receives the scattered seed that a full harvest will be enjoyed.

Often, when Jesus spoke to his disciples or addressed large crowds, his final words were brief but very much to the point.
Today they are: 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear.
' The seed, being as Jesus explained the 'word,' requires an open ear and a receptive heart, before there can be any hope for growth and productivity.
We live in a world which is in so much need of the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ and for many people troubles and worries can overburden them causing stress, depression, and other problems.
There are remedies for these and for a Christian they can be found within the Church, not overlooking the value of science and medicine.
When Justyn Martyr, the Philosopher and great defender of the Faith, was writing of the place of the Divine Liturgy in the life of a Christian and Christian communities, life was presenting the same age-old difficulties and when we hear of Jesus talking about the cares of the world spoiling the word’s possibility of being heard and yielding harvest we can with more fervour say at the Great Entrance: 'We, who in a mystery represent the Cherubim and sing the thrice-holy hymn to the life-giving Trinity, let us now lay aside every care of this life.
'

Day 09-Oct-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Apostle James, Son of Alphaeus.

He was one of the Twelve Apostles, the brother of the Apostle and Evangelist St Matthew. After Pentecost he preached the Gospel in many nations, and was finally martyred in Egypt, crucified by pagans.

Saints Andronicus and Athanasia (5th c.)

Andronicus was a goldsmith who lived in Antioch during the reign of Theodosius the Great (379-395). He and his wife Athanasia were devout Christians who strove to follow Christ in all things. They gave a third of all that they earned to the poor, another third to the Church, and lived on the remainder. After they had two children, they agreed to live henceforth as brother and sister. Both their children died on the same day, and they grieved inconsolably until St Justin the Martyr appeared to Athanasia at the children's grave and told her that her children were in the Kingdom of God, happier than they had ever been on earth. Andronicus and Athanasia then travelled to Egypt, where each took up the monastic life in different monasteries. After living for many years in asceticism, they reposed in peace within ten days of one another.

Holy and Righteous Abraham and Lot

Read their story in the book of Genesis. They are also commemorated on the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers, Dec 11-17.

St Stephen the Blind, Prince of Serbia (1476)

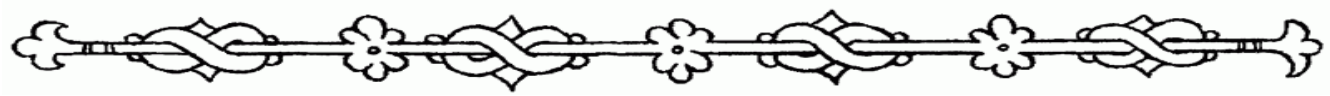
He was born in 1417. Stephen and his younger brother Gregory were taken captive by the Turks and blinded on the day of Pascha 1441; several years later they were ransomed back to their father. After his father's death, Stephen, though blind, ruled Serbia for a short time, but was deposed in a coup and exiled to Albania. There he met St Angelina, whom he married in 1461. Their marriage was blessed with three children. Once again Stephen was threatened by the Turks and fled with his family to Trieste in Italy. There he held firmly to the Orthodox faith despite strong pressures to convert to Roman Catholicism. The holy prince, having patiently endured the many hardships of his life, reposed in peace in 1476. Years after his death, a heavenly light miraculously appeared over his tomb. When the tomb was opened, his relics were found to be incorrupt; the sick were healed by touching them, and the blind received their sight. The relics were placed in the Monastery of Krushedol, founded by his widow St Angelina. The Monastery

was sacked in 1716 by the Turks, who burned the church and cut the holy relics to pieces. Some fragments still remain at the reconstructed monastery.

Holy Hieromartyr Denis (Dionysius), first Bishop of Paris (ca. 258)

Saint Denis (a westernization of the the Greek Dionysius), was one of seven bishops sent to Gaul by the Bishop of Rome during the reign of the Emperor Decius. Their mission was to extend the spread of the Gospel in that mostly-pagan land. While most of the bishops were sent to major settlements, St Denis was assigned to the small, remote pagan town of Lutetia — which later grew to become the city of Paris. He and his companions settled outside the town in a house given to him by a convert, where the few Christians could meet in secret. Soon, through the holy bishop's grace-filled preaching and his many miracles, Christianity grew rapidly.

Soon a fierce persecution of Christians swept through Gaul, and many of the faithful were abused, tortured or put to death. Saint Denis, fearless of danger and heedless of his own old age, travelled among the Christians, visiting the prisoners and exhorting all to remain firm in their confession of Christ. Soon he himself was arrested along with several companions, and was tortured without pity. When was publicly hung on a cross, he preached to the onlookers of the mystery of Christ's Passion. Taken back to prison, he celebrated the holy Eucharist for the last time, enveloped in a heavenly light. He and a host of other Martyrs were then beheaded on a hill, now called Montmartre in their memory. There is a tradition that at his beheading he rose up, took his own head in his hands, and walked for several miles to a place that later became the Basilica of St Denis in the town named after him. Before the French Revolution, the Kings and Queens of France were buried in this church.



Day 09-Oct-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Philippians 1:1-7; Luke 4:37-44
1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Jesus Christ; To all the saints in Christ Jesus who
are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons: 2Grace to you and peace, from
God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.
3I give thanks to my God whenever I remember you, 4and I always pray with joy
when I intercede on your behalf 5because of your partnership in the furtherance of
the Good News, even from the very first day until now.
6 I am confident of this very thing: that God who began a good work in you will
complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.
7 It is right for me to think this way about you, because I have you in my heart and
because you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in
the defense and confirmation of the Good News.

Gospel Reading:
37 News about him went out into every place of the surrounding region.
The healing of Peter's (Simon's) mother in law – Other healings 38 Jesus left the
synagogue and entered into Simon's house.
Simon's motherin-law was afflicted with a great fever, and they asked him [to do
something] for her.
39 He stood over her, rebuked the fever, and it left her.
Immediately, she rose up and served them.
40 When the sun was setting, all those who had anyone sick with various diseases
brought them to Jesus;d and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed
them.
41 Demons also came out from many, crying out, 'You are the Christ, the Son of
God!' Rebuking them, Jesus did not allow them to speak, because they knew that
he was the Christ.
42 When it was day, he departed and went into an uninhabited place.
The people were looking for him and came to him.
They held on to Jesus in order to prevent him from leaving them.
43 But he said to them, 'I must preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God to
the other cities as well.
I have been sent for this reason!' 44 And he continued preaching in the
synagogues of Galilee.

Day 10-Oct-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Holy Martyrs Eulampius and Eulampia (196)

They were brother and sister, from Nicomedia, who suffered for Christ during the reign of Maximian. Eulampius was arrested for his Christian faith; when his sister received the news, she hurried to join him. Both were subjected to various cruel tortures, including being cast into fire and boiling pitch, from which they miraculously emerged unharmed. Finally, Eulampius was beheaded, and Eulampia gave up her spirit before she too could be beheaded.

Blessed Fool for Christ Andrew of Totma (1637)

"Saint Andrew came of a family of devout, unlettered peasants. He obtained an education by going to church and, on the death of his parents, became a novice at the Monastery of Galich, in the diocese of Kostroma. The Abbot, who was remarkable for his wisdom, discerned Andrew's spiritual gifts and encouraged him to undertake the unusual and difficult ascesis of Foolishness-for-Christ. Andrew left the monastery to lead a wayfaring life, but often returned to reveal his thoughts and deeds to his starets. On his Elder's death, he settled near the Church of the Resurrection in the town of Totma, where he was completely unknown. He spent the whole night in prayer and during the day begged alms that he forthwith gave to the poor. He went barefoot summer and winter and lived on nothing but bread and water. Every year he made a pilgrimage to the holy places of the region. One day he was accosted by the chief of an outlandish tribe. The man was suffering from an eye complaint and asked Andrew, who was already looked upon as a wonderworker, to cure him. Andrew fled, but the wild man washed his eyes in the snow trodden by the Saint and was healed.

"Worn out by ascesis and privation, Saint Andrew foreknew the day of his decease. He called a priest, confessed and communicated in the holy Mysteries, and not long after he fell asleep in the Lord, a heavenly scent pervading the room where his body lay. Some time later, the Saint appeared to a sick woman as she slept, holding the Gospel for her to venerate and telling her to pray at his tomb. When she awoke, the woman was healed." (Synaxarion)

Holy Martyrs of Zographou

Venerable Theophilus the Confessor

Venerable Bassian

Day 10-Oct-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Philippians 1:8-14; Luke 5:12-16

8 For God is my witness: I long for all of you in the tender mercies of Christ Jesus!
9 I pray [especially] for this, that your love may overflow even more, with an increase of knowledge and all discernment.
10 This way, you will be able to discern what things are excellent, so that you may be sincere and without offense until the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruits of righteousness which are through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God! The progress of the Good News 12 Now, I want to you to know, brethren, that what happened to me has turned out to be for the progress of the Good News!
13 It became clear to the whole palace guard and to others that my chains are in Christ, 14 and most of the brethren in the Lord, being confident through my bonds, are even bolder to speak the word of God without fear.

Gospel Reading:

12 It happened, while Jesus was in one of the cities, that there was a man full of leprosy.
When he saw Jesus, he fell on his face, and begged him, saying, 'Lord, if you want to, you can make me clean.
13 Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, 'I want to! Be made clean.
Immediately the leprosy left him.
14 Jesus commanded him to tell no one: 'But go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing according to what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.
15 Still, the report concerning him spread much more, and great multitudes came together to hear and to be healed by him of their infirmities.
16 However, Jesus withdrew into the desert and prayed.

Day 11-Oct-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Apostle Philip, One of the Seven Deacons

Saint Philip was born at Caesarea in Palestine. He was married, and had four daughters who consecrated their virginity to God and were given the gift of prophecy (Acts 21:8). The Apostles ordained him deacon at the same time as Stephen (Acts 6), to assist in the service of tables and in charitable works. When the Apostolic college dispersed to proclaim the Gospel, Philip spread the Glad Tidings of Salvation throughout Samaria. He baptized Simon the magician who feigned conversion in the hope of making money by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Then the Lord sent him along the Gaza road to the minister of the Ethiopian Queen Candace, as he travelled south from Jerusalem in his chariot, reading the prophecy of Isaiah. Philip gave him the key to the mysterious words of the Prophet about the Saviour, baptized him and was caught away by the Spirit to continue his preaching at Azotus. From there he evangelized all the cities through which he passed till he came to Caesarea (Acts 8). After that, he made his way to the province of Trallia in Asia Minor. There he led a great many pagans to the knowledge of God, built a church, and fell asleep in peace.

Source: The Synaxarion: The Lives of the Saints of the Orthodox Church. Volume One, Introduction, September, October. Holy Convent of The Annunciation of Our Lady, Ormylia (Chalkidike), 1998.

Apolytikion

O Holy Apostle Philip, intercede to our merciful God, that He may grant our souls forgiveness of sins.

Kontakion

Since thou wast enlightened by the Holy Spirit, thou enlightenest the earth and all its fullness with the beams of thy wise teachings and miracles, Apostle Philip, thou sacred initiate.

† Synaxis of the Holy Startsi of Optina Monastery

Commemorated today are our holy fathers Moses, Antony, Leonid(Lev), Macarius, Hilarion, Ambrose, Anatolius I, Isaac I, Joseph, Barsanuphius, Anatolius the Younger, Nectarius, Nikon the Confessor, and Hieromartyr Isaac the Younger. Hieromartyr Isaac was shot by the Bolsheviks on December 26 1937.

This feast commemorates a few of the holy Fathers who made the Optina Hermitage (Pustyn) a focus for the powerful renewal movement that spread through the Church in Russia beginning early in the nineteenth century, and continuing up to (and even into) the atheist persecutions of the twentieth century. Saint Paisius Velichkovsky (November 15) was powerfully influential in bringing the almost-lost hesychastic tradition of Orthodox spirituality to Russia in the eighteenth century, and his labors found in Optina Monastery a 'headquarters' from which they spread throughout the Russian land. The monastery itself had been in existence since at least the sixteenth century, but had fallen into decay through the anti-monastic policies of Catherine II and other modernizing rulers. Around 1790, Metropolitan Platon of Moscow undertook a mission to restore and revive the monastery in the tradition set forth by St Paisius. By the early 1800s the monastery (located about 80 miles from Moscow) had become a beacon of Orthodox spirituality, partly through their publication of Orthodox spiritual texts, but more importantly through the lineage of divinely-enlightened spiritual fathers (startsi, plural of starets) who served as guides to those, noble and peasant, who flocked to the monastery for their holy counsel. The fathers aroused some controversy in their own day; a few critics (some of them from other monasteries) disapproved of their allowing the Jesus Prayer to become widely-known among the people, fearing that it would give rise to spiritual delusion (prelest). For a wonderful depiction of the deep influence of the Jesus Prayer on Russian life during this period, read the anonymously-writtenWay of a Pilgrim.

With the coming of the Russian Revolution in 1917, the monastery was of course officially shut down, but some of the Fathers were able to keep it running for a time as an 'agricultural legion'. Over the years, most of the Fathers were dispersed, to die in exile, in prison camps, or by the firing squad. Many of them are known to have continued to function as startsi to their spiritual children, despite great danger and hardship, for the remainder of their time on earth.

Commemoration of the Optina startsi was approved by the Synod of the Russian Church Abroad in 1990, and by the Moscow Patriarchate in 1996. The Optina Monastery itself was officially re-established in 1987.

Saint Theophanes the Hymnographer (the Branded) (847)

He was born in Arabia to wealthy Christian parents. He and his brother Theodore (December 27) became monks in the monastery of St Sabbas the Sanctified. During the iconoclast persecutions, they were sent by Patriarch Thomas of Jerusalem to the Emperor Leo the Armenian, to defend the veneration of icons. The Emperor had the two brothers tortured and imprisoned; then, as a final insult, he had a condemnation branded (or, by another account, tattooed) on their faces in twelve lines of iambic verse. When the iconoclast persecution ended, Theophanes was freed and was soon made a bishop. In all, he suffered for the holy icons for twenty-five years. Both he and his brother Theodore composed many Canons and hymns, which are still used in the Church's services. He reposed in peace.

Our Holy Father Philotheos Kokkinos,Patriarch of Constantinople (1379)

He was born in Thessalonika around 1300; his mother was a convert from Judaism. He entered monastic life, first at Mt Sinai, then at the Great Lavra on Mt Athos. The so-called "Hesychast controversy" was then raging, and St Philotheos became one of the firmest and most effective supporters of St Gregory Palamas (November 14) in his defense of Orthodoxy against western-inspired attacks on the doctrines of uncreated Grace and the possibility of true union with God. It was St Philotheos who drafted the Hagiorite Tome, the manifesto of the monks of Mt Athos setting forth how the Saints partake of the Divine and uncreated Light which the Apostles beheld at Christ's Transfiguration. In 1351, he took part in the "Hesychast Council" in Constantinople, and wrote its Acts. In 1354 he was made Patriarch of Constantinople; he stepped down after one year, but was recalled to the Patriarchal throne in 1364. He continued to be a zealous champion of undiluted Orthodoxy, writing treatises setting forth the theology of the Uncreated Energies of God and refuting the scholastic philosophy that was then infecting the Western church. Despite (or because of?) his uncompromising Orthodoxy, he always sought a true, rather than political, reconciliation with the West, and even worked to convene an Ecumenical Council to resolve the differences between the churches. This holy Patriarch was deposed in 1376 when the Emperor Andronicus IV came to the throne; he died in exile in 1379.

St Philotheos composed the Church's services to St Gregory Palamas. He is not listed in the Synaxaria, but is venerated as a Saint in the Greek church.

Holy Martyrs Zenais and Philonilla

Our Holy Father Nectarius, Arsacuis and Sisinius, Patriarchs of Constantinople

Day 11-Oct-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Readings of the day: Philippians 1:12-20; Luke 5:33-39

12 Now, I want to you to know, brethren, that what happened to me has turned out
to be for the progress of the Good News! 13 It became clear to the whole palaceb
guard and to others that my chains are in Christ,
14 and most of the brethren in the Lord, being confident through my bonds, are
even bolder to speak the word of God without fear.
15 Yes, some actually preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, and some also out of
good will.
16 The first group preaches Christ without sincerity and from selfish ambition,
thinking that they are adding affliction to my imprisonment; 17 but the second
group does so out18 Either way, it does not matter.
I only care that whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed! I rejoice in this,
yes, and will continue to rejoice.
19 For I know that this will turn out to my salvation, through your supplication and
the support of Christ's Spirit.
20 It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame in any way,
but that as I speak with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my
body, whether by my life or by my death.

Gospel Reading:

33 They asked him, 'Why do John's disciples often fast and pray, as also the
disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink?' 34 Jesusa said to them, 'Can
you make the friends of the bridegroom fast, while the bridegroom is with them? 35
But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them.
Then, they will fast in those days.
36 He also told them a parable: 'No one puts a piece from a new garment on an
old garment, or else he will tear the new, and also the piece from the new will not
match the old.
37 No one puts new wine into old wineskins, or else the new wine will burst the
skins, and it will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed.
38 Instead, new wine must be put into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved.
39 No one who has drunk old wine immediately desires new, for he says, 'The old
is better!"

Day 12-Oct-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

St Symeon the New Theologian (1022)

As a young man he became a monk in the Studite Monastery in Constantinople; later he bacame abbot of the Monastery of St Mamas, also in Constantinople. After a life of great asceticism, including many trials, criticisms and afflictions, he reposed in peace. (He reposed on March 12, but since this day always falls during the Great Fast, his feast is kept today.) His teaching on the soul's ability to enter directly into communion with God in this life aroused some opposition in his own time, and the title 'New Theologian' was not always applied in a positive sense. His experiential, mystical teachings are firmly rooted in his doctrine of the Church: his writings contain many powerful affirmations of the centrality of participation in the Mysteries in our struggle for salvation. He is the author of many sublimely beautiful sermons, writings and hymns, a number of them in metered verse. With St John the Evangelist and St Gregory, Patriarch of Constantinople, he is one of only three whom the Church has officially called "Theologian."

Holy Martyrs Probus, Tarachus and Andronicus (304)

All three suffered during the reign of Diocletian. Though born in three different places, the three were found to be Christians at Pompeiopolis in Cilicia, arrested together, and brought before the Governor, Numerian Maximus. Tarachus was sixty-five years old at the time of his arrest, but his captors showed no respect for his age, tormenting him as cruelly as the others. All three immediately and boldly confessed their faith, and were put to many vicious tortures, during which Probus said to Maximus, 'This bloodshed is oil and perfume for me to anoint myself with joy for further contests.' At one point the persecutors forcibly stuffed Andronicus' mouth with meat and wine that had been offered to idols, thinking that in doing so they were winning a victory. Andronicus only mocked them, explaining that only wilful apostasy brings defeat to a Christian.

Finally, Maximus ordered them taken to the theater and thrown to wild beasts for the entertainment of the people. Though the beasts had just torn others to pieces, they would not touch the holy martyrs, but played and fawned around them: A ferocious bear licked their wounds, and a lioness played affectionately around Tarachus. Seeing this, many in the crowd believed in Christ and denounced the Governor. The furious Maximus ordered his soldiers to enter the arena and cut the three to pieces. Three Christians who had witnessed the spectacle came by night to retrieve their bodies, but

were unable to distinguish the martyrs' relics amid the general carnage. When they prayed for divine aid, three lights appeared above the bodies of the three holy ones, and they were given honorable burial in a mountain cave.

Saint Martin of Tours

Day 12-Oct-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Philippians 1:20-27; Luke 6:12-19

20 It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame in any way,
but that as I speak with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my
body, whether by my life or by my death.
21For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain.
22 But if I remain alive in the flesh, this will bring fruit from my work.
Yet, I do not know what I will choose! 23 I am in a dilemma between the two,
having the desire to be released and be with Christ, which is far better.
24 At the same time, to remain in the flesh is a more urgent need for your sake.
25 Having this confidence, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for
your progress and joy in faith, 26 so that your rejoicing may overflow in Christ
Jesus when I am with you again.
27 [In the meantime], let your way of life be worthy of the Good News of Christ, so
that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I may hear this about your
condition: that you stand firm in one spirit, striving with one soul for the faith of the
Good News.

Gospel Reading:

12 It happened in these days, that Jesus went out into the mountain to pray; and
he continued all night, in prayer to God.
13 When day came, he called his disciples and chose twelve from among them,
which he also named 'apostles': 14 Simon, whom he also named Peter; Andrew,
his brother; James;d John; Philip; Bartholomew; 15 Matthew; Thomas; James, the
son of Alphaeus; Simon, who was called the Zealot; 16 Judas [the son] of James;
and Judas Iscariot, who also became a traitor.
17 He came down with them and stood on a level place.
A large number of his disciples and of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the
sea coast of Tyre and Sidon came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases.
18 Those who were troubled by unclean spirits also came, and they were healed.
19 The whole multitude desired to touch him because power came out from him
and healed them all.

Day 13-Oct-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Hieromartyr Benjamin the Deacon

> This soldier of Christ was a Persian who zealously preached the Gospel and brought many pagans, both Persians and Greeks, to the Christian Faith. He suffered during the reign of the Persian King Yezdegeherd, circa 412. When he was cast into prison, one of the king's nobles defended him to the king. The king then released him, under the condition that he no longer preach Christ to the people. Benjamin boldly said: 'This I can never give up. For he who hides the talent given him will be given over to great suffering,' and he continued to spread the Christian Faith. The emperor had him seized, and commanded that thorns be driven under his nails, and he was further tortured until he rendered his spirit to God.
>
> ***Source: St. Nikolai Velimirovic, The Prologue of Ohrid – Volume Two.***

Holy Martyrs Carpus and Papylus, with Agathodorus and Agathonica (251)

> Saint Carpus was Bishop of Thyatira, and Papylus was his deacon. In the reign of the Emperor Decius, both were arrested as Christians and put to torture. Agathodorus their servant and Agathonica, Papylus' sister, willingly followed after them and voluntarily confessed Christ also. After many sufferings, all four were beheaded.

Holy Martyr Zlata (Chryse) (1796)

> "Born in the village of Slatina in the Meglin region [of Bulgaria], of poor peasants who had three other daughters, St Zlata was a meek and devout girl, wise with Christ's wisdom and golden ('zlata' means 'gold') not only in name but also in her God-fearing heart. When Zlata went out one day to get water, some shameless Turks seized her and carried her off to their house. When one of them urged her to embrace Islam and become his wife, Zlata answered fearlessly: 'I believe in Christ, and know Him alone as my bridegroom; I shall never deny Him even if you put me to a thousand tortures and cut me into pieces.' Her parents and sisters then arrived, and said to her: 'O our daughter, have mercy on yourself and us. Deny Christ publicly, that we can all be happy. Christ is merciful; He will forgive your sin, committed under the pressure of life.' Her poor parents and kinsfolk wept bitterly. But Zlata's heroic soul would not be overcome by devilish seduction. She replied to her parents: 'When you urge me to deny Christ, the true God, you are no longer parents or sisters to me; I have the Lord Jesus Christ as father, the Mother of

God as mother and, for brothers and sisters, the saints.' Then the Turks threw her into prison, where she lay for three months, and they took her out every day and flogged her until her blood flowed onto the ground. Finally, they hanged her upside-down and made a fire to choke her to death with the smoke. But God was with Zlata, and gave her strength in her suffering. At the very end, they hanged her from a tree and cut her into small pieces. Thus this martyr-maiden gave her soul into God's hands, and entered into the realm of Paradise, in 1796. Pieces of her relics were taken by Christians to their homes, that they might bring a blessing to them." (Prologue)
Holy Martyr Florentius
Chryse the New Martyr of Greece

Day 13-Oct-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Philippians 1:27-2:4; Luke 6:17-23
27 [In the meantime], let your way of life be worthy of the Good News of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I may hear this about your condition: that you stand firm in one spirit, striving with one soul for the faith of the Good News.
28 Do not be terrified by your opponents.
This will be for them evidence of destruction, but to you, of salvation from God.
29 For the sake of Christ, you have been granted the privilege not only to believe in him but also to suffer on his behalf, 30 and so you are engaged in the same battle which you saw me fight and that you hear that I am [still] fighting.
2 A call to humility Therefore, if there is any exhortation in Christ, any consolation of love, any communion of the Spirit, any tender mercies and compassion, 2make my joy full, by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord and of one mind.
3 Do nothing through rivalry or conceit, but in humility, consider others better than yourselves.
4Do not just look after you own selfish interests but each one of you should consider the interests of others.
Gospel reading:

17 He came down with them and stood on a level place.
A large number of his disciples and of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases.
18 Those who were troubled by unclean spirits also came, and they were healed.
19 The whole multitude desired to touch him because power came out from him and healed them all.
The Lord's sermon 20 Jesus looked up to his disciples, and said: Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God.
21 Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be filled.
Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.
22 Blessed are you when men shall hate you, and when they shall exclude and mock you, and throw out your name as evil for the sake of the Son of Man.
23 Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven, for their fathers did the same thing to the prophets.

Day 14-Oct-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Holy Martyrs Nazarius, Gervasius, Protasius, and Celsus of Milan (1st c.)

These martyrs contested for the faith in Milan, and were beheaded under the Emperor Nero. Many years later, their relics were discovered by St Ambrose through a vision, and were given honorable burial.

Saint Cosmas the Hymnographer (8th c.)

He was from Jerusalem. An orphan, he was adopted into the family of St John of Damascus (commemorated December 4). He became Bishop of Maiuma, a city on the coast of Palestine, which was later named Constantia. Like his adoptive brother he became a noted hymnographer: The Canon of the Cross (Sept. 14) and the Canon for Christ's Nativity, "Christ is born, give ye glory..." are his compositions.

Saint Nicholas the Pious (Sviatosha), Prince of Chernigov (1143)

He was the first Russian prince to forsake the world and enter monastic life, at the Lavra of the Kiev Caves. Though his brothers according to the flesh tried to turn him back from his chosen path, he embraced monastic life zealously, amazing his fellow-monks by his humility and piety. Despite his rank, he insisted upon being treated like the simplest novice, performing the meanest tasks joyfully. In time his abbot allowed him to withdraw from the common life, living entirely in his cell in constant prayer. He reposed in peace in 1143. A few months later his brother Prince Iziaslav was healed of a grave illness when he put on St Nicholas' hair shirt and drank some water from the monastery. The Prince asked to be clothed in the hairshirt on the day of his death.

Saint Parascheva The New

St. Parascheva was born at the beginning of the 11th century A.D. into a wealthy, noble, and pious Christian family in the town of Epivat (now in Turkey) on the shores of the Marmara Sea. At the age of ten, while attending the liturgy in the 'Church of the Holy Theotokos", she heard the words, 'Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me.' The words of the Lord had a profound effect on the young girl, and they became the subject of her meditations. The future St. Parascheva began to dress poor people in her expensive clothes – her good deeds later earning her recognition as a patron saint of such trades as spinning, sewing, weaving, and knitting – but her parents objected, finding the girl’s charity more than they could understand or support, and trying to get her to stop. To follow her calling, Parascheva abandoned her wealth and privileges, left her parents, and ran away to Constantinople. There, near relics of saints, she spent her

time in prayer, meditating on the words of Christ. To elude her parents, who were traveling from city to city trying to find her, she moved to Chalcedon, and then to the 'Church of the Most Holy Theotokos", in Heraclea Pontica, near the Black Sea. She spent the next five years there, living an austere life of continuous prayer and devotion. During her prayers she received visions of the Holy Virgin Mary and in one of the visions, she was instructed to go to Jerusalem. After spending some time in the city, she joined a convent in the Jordanian desert. A few years later, she returned to Constantinople and then, at the age of twenty-five, moved to the village of Katikratia where, at the 'Church of the Holy Apostles", she lived the remaining two years of her life. Legend has it that many years later an old sinner was buried near her grave.

Parascheva appeared in a dream to a local monk, showed him the place of her burial, and asked him to 'take that stinky corpse away from me. I am light and sun, and I cannot bear to have near me darkness and stench.' The monk, with some local help, began to dig out the place he had seen in his dream and when they found the remains of the Saint, her uncorrupted body was emitting spiritual fragrances. Then they interred the Saint in the 'Church of the Holy Apostles", where she had spent the last years of her earthly existence. Later on her relics were moved to Tirnovo, in Bulgaria, then to Belgrade, in Serbia, and finally to Constantinople. In 1641, they were given as a gift to the Prince of Moldavia, Vasile Lupu, in recognition of his support for the Ecumenical Patriarchy of Constantinople. Her intact relics have remained in Iasi ever since. She is venerated as the Protector of Iasi and all of Moldavia and each year, hundreds of thousands of Orthodox faithful and hierarchs from many countries gather in Iasi to celebrate her feast day and venerate her holy relics, which continue to work miracles. Currently, she is recognized mostly by the Orthodox Churches from Romania, Greece, Bulgaria, Russia and Serbia. People also call her Saint Friday.Saint Parascheva is considered the Protector of Moldavia and Bucovina, being the most popular of all the Saints whose relics are in Romania. Christians believe in the miraculous powers of Her relics.

Venerable Parasceva (Petka) of Serbia

Saint Ignatius, Archbishop of Mithymna

Day 14-Oct-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: 1 Corinthians 15:58-16:3; Luke 5:17-26

58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always active in the Lord's work, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

1 Now, concerning the collection for the saints, do as I instructed the Churches of Galatia.

2 On the first day of the week, each one of you should put aside and reserve according to God's blessing, so that no collections be made when I come. 3 When I arrive, I will send whoever you approve with letters to carry your gracious gift to Jerusalem.

Gospel Reading:

17 It happened, on one of those days, that Jesus was teaching; and there were Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting by, who had come out of every village of Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem.

The power of the Lord was with him to heal the people.

18 Behold, men brought a paralyzed man on a cot, and they sought to bring him in to lay before Jesus.

19 Not finding a way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up to the housetop and let him down through the tiles with his cot, right in the center, in front of Jesus.

20 Seeing their faith, Jesus said to him, 'Man, your sins are forgiven you.

21 The scribes and the Pharisees began to think about this, saying, 'Who is this that speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?' 22 But Jesus, perceiving their thoughts, answered them, 'Why are you reasoning in your hearts in such a way? 23 Which is easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you;' or to say, 'Arise and walk?' 24 However, so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins' (he said to the paralyzed man), 'I tell you, arise, take up your cot, and go to your house.

25 Immediately, the man rose up before them and took up what he was laying on, and departed to his house, glorifying God.

26 Amazement took hold of all, and they glorified God.

They were filled with fear, saying, 'We have seen strange things today!'

Day 15-Oct-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Holy Hieromartyr Lucian, Presbyter of the Church of Antioch (312)

He was born in Samosata in Syria (and is sometimes referred to as "Lucian of Samosata") of noble parents. In his youth he received an excellent education. Though a privileged life was open to him, he gave all his goods away to the poor and embraced a life of asceticism, supporting himself writing and tutoring. He produced an edition of the
Old Testament, freeing it from various corruptions introduced by heretics. He was made a priest in Antioch, where he served the Church faithfully. During the persecutions of Maximian, he was arrested while visiting Nicomedia to strengthen the faithful there. He was cast into prison for his faith and allowed to perish of hunger and thirst. Saint John Chrysostom wrote of him: "He scorned hunger; let us also scorn luxury and destroy the lordship of the stomach; that we may, when the time comes for us to meet such torture, be prepared beforehand, by the help of a lesser ascesis, to show ourselves worthy of glory in the hour of battle."

Venerable Euthymius the New
Savinos the Bishop of Catania
Barses the Confessor of Edessa

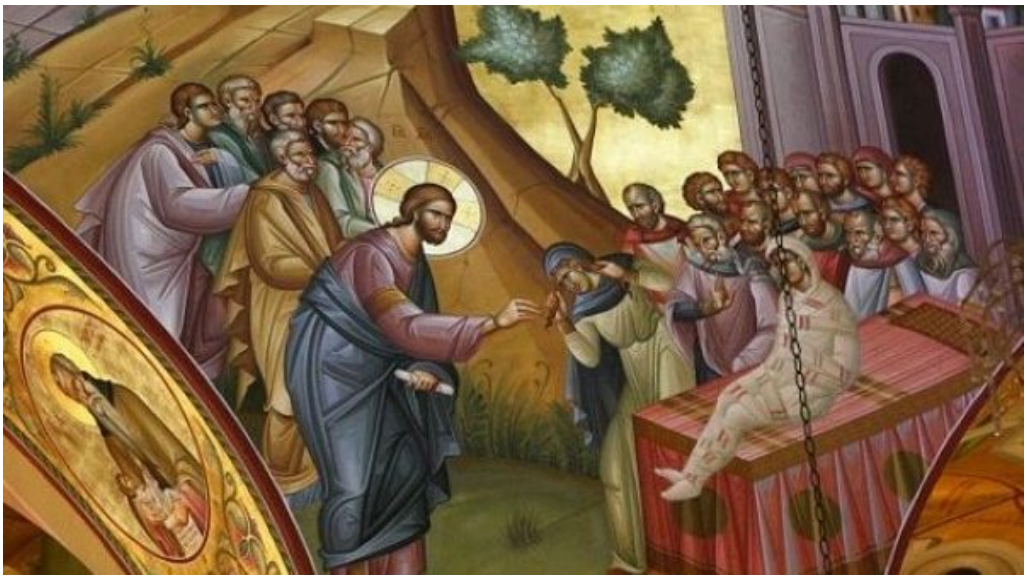
Day 15-Oct-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

The Widow of Nain
Galatians 1:11-19; Luke 7:11-16
11 As regards the Good News which I preached, I proclaimed this to you, brethren,
that it is not of human origin.
12 I did not receive it from man and I was not taught [this Good News] by man, but
it came to me through a revelation of Jesus Christ.
13 You have heard about how I used to live in Judaism, how I persecuted the
Church of God beyond measure, and how I ravaged it.
14 I advanced in the Jewish religion beyond many of my own age among my
countrymen, as I was more extremely zealous for the traditions of my forefathers.
15 But when it was the good pleasure of God, (who had set me apart from my
mother's womb and called me through his grace, 16 to reveal his Son in me so that
I might preach him among the Gentiles), I did not immediately confer with flesh and
blood: 17 I did not go up to Jerusalem to visit those who were apostles before me,
but I went away into Arabia.
Later on, I returned to Damascus.
18 Then, after three years, I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Peter and I stayed with
him for fifteen days.
19 However, I did not see any of the other apostles,a except James, 'the Lord's
brother.

Gospel Reading: 3rd Sunday of Luke: The Widow of Nain

11 Soon afterwards, Jesus went to a city called Nain.
Many of his disciples, along with a great multitude, went with him.
12 Now, when Jesus drew near to the gate of the city, behold, a dead person was
being carried out, who was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.
Many people of the city were with her.
13 When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said to her, 'Do not cry.
14 He came near and touched the coffin, and the bearers stood still.
He then said, 'Young man, I tell you, arise!' 15 And the dead man sat up, and
began to speak.
Jesus then gave him to his mother.
16 They were all filled with awe and glorified God, saying, 'A great prophet has
arisen among us!' and, 'God has visited his people!' 17 This news concerning



Jesus spread throughout Judea and in all the surrounding countryside.

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING

'Do not weep"
Today's Gospel passage is an account of one of the most vividly memorable events in the Holy Scripture.
In a few simple sentences St Luke shows us our Lord, surrounded by crowds, approaching the gates of the city, just as a young man is borne out on a bier for burial outside the city wall.
The only son of his widowed mother, he is accompanied by her.
The love of our Lord is movingly expressed in the one word: 'εσπλαγχνίσθη', full of pity he had compassion on her.
He immediately spoke to her, 'Do not weep".
He stopped the cortege and gave life back to the young man so that he sat up and talked.
The impact of this was overwhelming, and everyone was frightened.
Whatever had been in the minds of the mourners and the crowds was driven out.
This was clearly the work of God.
The two things they shouted out – 'a great prophet has arisen amongst us' and 'God has visited His people' both giving voice to the fulfilment of centuries of yearning and longing for release from bondage.
That which was 'promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed for ever' had suddenly become a reality before their eyes.
They glorified God and proclaimed the news to all the surrounding area.
Those of us who have heard the Gospel stories many times can often be at a disadvantage compared to those who hear for the first time.
We can easily let the familiar stories wash over us, leaving us unmoved, just as we hear the familiar words of the liturgy and allow them to pass us by.
One thing we can pick up today is the infectious enthusiasm of those people of Nain so that we can respond to the call of the deacon 'Wisdom, Stand aright….
', jump to it and clear our minds of all the detritus with which we fill it; we are in the presence of the Wisdom of God.
St Luke's account of today's miracle at Nain ends with the words 'and He gave him

to his mother.
’ As we leave this city, we are left with the beautiful image of our Lord with the mother and her restored son in the stillness of their love for one another, untouched by the busy crowd.
May we find such peace.

Day 16-Oct-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Martyr Longinus the Centurion (1st c.)

Saint Longinus lived in the reign of the Emperor Tiberius (AD 15-34). He came from Cappadocia and served as a centurion in the Roman army, under the orders of Pilate, the Governor of Judaea. He and his men were commanded to carry into effect Pilate's sentence regarding the holy Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and to guard the tomb for fear the disciples should come and steal away His body to lend credence to His resurrection. So it came about that Longinus witnessed all the astonishing miracles that accompanied Christ's Passion: the earthquake, the darkening of the sun, the rending of the veil of the temple, the splitting of the rocks, the opening of the graves and the appearance, in their risen bodies, of many of the Saints of ancient times. The eyes of the centurion's heart were opened at the sight of these portents, and he cried with a loud voice: *Truly, this man was the Son of God!* (Mk. 15:39; Matt. 27:54). On the third day, when the guards witnessed the Angel appearing to the holy women at the tomb, they shook with fear and became as dead men. Some of them went to tell the chief priests of the Jews all that had happened. The chief priests and elders met and decided to give Longinus and his men a large sum of money, if they would put it about that the disciples had come by night and stolen away Christ's body while the guards were asleep. But Longinus and two of his soldiers refused this money, for they were now and forever illumined by the light of faith in the Resurrection. So, leaving the army and his military duties behind him, Longinus went back to his home country of Cappadocia, where he preached the Good News just as the Apostles were doing. When Pilate learnt of this he wrote to the Emperor Tiberius denouncing Longinus, which the chief priests, bent on vengeance, had prevailed on him to do by giving him money and presents.

The men the Emperor sent in search of Longinus called, in God's providence, at the house where he had taken refuge; they asked for hospitality and for information as to the whereabouts of the deserter, who was unknown to them by sight. It was the Saint himself who received them, with the care for strangers customary among disciples of Christ. As they talked, Longinus was

exceedingly joyful on learning the purpose of their journey, and he redoubled his efforts to put his guests at their ease. Then he left them, and with complete serenity prepared his grave and everything necessary for his burial. He went to look for the two companions who had fled from Palestine with him, and they decided to offer themselves to martyrdom at his side. He then went back to his guests and told them that he was the Longinus they were looking for to put to death. The Emperor's agents were astounded at the calmness of his manner and, considering the hospitality they have received, deeply distressed because of the dark deed they had come to do. But the Saint implored them to make haste in uniting him and his companions to their Lord and Master. Sick at heart, they beheaded the three disciples of Christ and sent the head of Saint Longinus to Jerusalem to certify Pilate and the chief priests that he had indeed been put to death. His head was then thrown into a cesspit outside the city.

Many years later, a wealthy Cappadocian lady, who had fallen ill and lost her sight, came on pilgrimage to Jerusalem to pray for healing, accompanied by her only son. But upon their arrival in the Holy City her son died suddenly, adding a yet greater sorrow to the anguish of the unfortunate lady. One night, Saint Longinus appeared to her in a dream and revealed the spot where his head was buried, with the assurance that she would receive healing from this precious relic. After an assiduous search, the pious woman found the holy Martyr's head, and her blindness was indeed taken away by the divine grace resting upon the relic. Not only were her bodily eyes opened but God granted her to see, with the eyes of her soul, that her son had his place beside Saint Longinus in the abode of the blessed. Comforted and full of gratitude to God, who knows how to render a hundredfold to those whom he chastens, she placed the relic of the holy Martyr and the body of her son in a feretory that she took back to Cappadocia and placed in a church that she built in the Saint's honour.

Source: The Synaxarion: The Lives of the Saints of the Orthodox Church. Volume One, Introduction, September, October. Holy Convent of The Annunciation of Our Lady, Ormylia (Chalkidike), 1998.

<u>Kontakion</u>

With great joy the Church of Christ today rejoiceth on the festive memory of blest Longinus, the all-famed and godly prizewinner. And she doth cry out: O Christ, my foundation and might art Thou.

Our Venerable Father Gall, Enlightener of Switzerland (640)

He was born in Ireland to wealthy parents, who sent him to be educated at the Monastery of Bangor. There he embraced the ascetical life and became a

monk. He was one of the twelve monks who traveled with his spiritual father St Columbanus (November 23) as missionaries to Gaul. In time some of the group traveled into pagan lands, up the Rhine river to Lake Zurich. The monks settled on Lake Constance around a chapel dedicated to St Aurelia, which had been taken by the pagans as a shrine; they cleansed and reconsecrated the chapel, which became the center of their new monastery. Saint Gall lived as a hermit, serving the brethren by making nets and catching fish. In 612 St Columbanus went on to Italy with most of his disciples, leaving St Gall and a few others to continue their life. When St Gall delivered Frideburga, the daughter of a local duke, from a demon, he offered the saint a tract of land on the shores of Lake Constance; here was founded the monastery that in later times bore St Gall's name.

At various times, the holy Gall refused calls to become a bishop, or to take over the abbacy of the great monastery at Luxeuil. To all such requests he answered that he would rather serve than command. He continued living in his isolated monastic community until he reposed in peace in 640, at the age of ninety-nine. In later years, and continuing well into the middle ages, the Monastery of St Gall became famed for the holiness of its monks and for its library.

Venerable Longinus, the Lover of Labor
James Netsetov of Alaska

Day 16-Oct-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Philippians 2:12-16; Luke 6:24-30
C12 And so, my beloved, even as you have always obeyed, not only in my
presence, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with
fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work,
according to his good purpose.
14 Do all things without murmurings and disputes 15 in order to become blameless
and harmless, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and
perverse generation among whom you are seen as lights in the world.
16 Uphold the word of life, so that I may have a reason to glory in the day of
Christ: that I did not run or labor in vain.

Gospel Reading:
24 But woe to you who are rich! For you have received your consolation.
25 Woe to you, you who are full now, for you will be hungry.
Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.
26 Woe [to you,]a when all men speak well of you, for their fathers did the same
thing to the false prophets.
Love for one's enemies 27 But I tell you who hear: love your enemies, do good to
those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, and pray for those who
mistreat you.
29 To the one who strikes you on the cheek, offer also the other [cheek].
If someone takes away your cloak, do not refuse your coat as well.
30 Give to anyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not
demand it back.

Day 17-Oct-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Holy Prophet Hosea (820 BC)

His name means "God is Help." He is the first and earliest of the twelve Minor Prophets. At the Lord's command he married a harlot, who was repeatedly unfaithful to him despite his love and faithfulness toward her. In his prophetic writings he shows this marriage as an image of God's faithful care for His unfaithful people.

Holy Martyrs Cosmas and Damian, the Unmercenaries of Cilicia (4th c.)

The Church commemorates three pairs of brothers named Cosmas and Damian, all counted among the Unmercenary Physicians. The first reposed in peace and are commemorated on November 1; the second were stoned to death in Rome, and are commemorated on July 1; the third pair, commemorated today, were Arab doctors. They embraced the Christian faith together and thereafter cared for the sick in the name of the Lord Jesus, performing many miraculous healings. They were handed over to the governor Lysias by jealous pagans. When the governor accused them of healing by sorcery, they replied 'We have no sort of magic, nor use any, but we have the power of Christ to save us and all who call upon His holy Name.' The governor first attempted to bribe them to deny Christ then, when this was useless, subjected them to many tortures. Finally they were beheaded. Their holy relics continued to perform many miracles of healing.

Holy Martyrs Cosmas and Damian, the Unmercenaries of Arabia

Venerable Martyr Andrew of Crete

Saint Lazarus the Four-days-dead (Relics)

Day 17-Oct-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Philippians 2:17-23; Luke 6:37-45

17 Yes, even if I am poured out [as an offering] on the sacrifice and liturgy of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all.
18 In the same way, rejoice, rejoice with me! P 19 I hope in the Lord Jesus [that I will be able] to send you Timothy soon, so that I too may be encouraged when I learn how you are doing.
20 For I have no one else with the same soul, who will truly care about you, 21 unlike others who seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ.
22 But you know how he has proved himself; as a child serves a father, he has served with me to spread the Good News.
23 Therefore, I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see how things are going with me [here].

Gospel Reading:

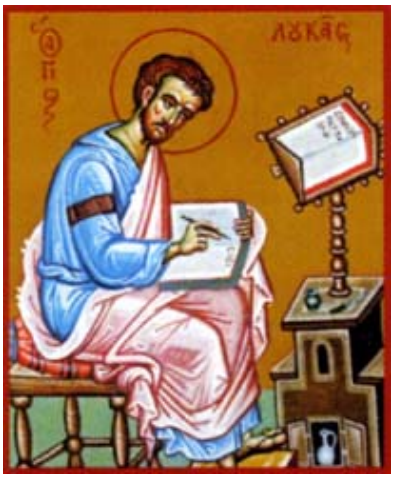
37 Do not judge, and you will not be judged.
Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned.
Set free, and you will be set free.
38 Give, and it will be given to you: a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and overflowing will be given to you.
For with the same measure [that] you measure, it will be measured back to you.
The tree and its fruits 39 He spoke a parable to them.
'Can the blind guide the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit?
40 A disciple is not above his teacher, but after being fully trained, everyone will be like their teacher.
41 Why do you see the speck of chaff that is in your brother's eye but do not consider the beam that is in your own eye?
42 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me remove the speck of chaff that is in your eye,' when you do not see the beam that is in your own eye? You hypocrites! First, remove the beam from your own eye, and then you will be able to see clearly in order to remove the speck of chaff that is in your brother's eye.
43 For there is no good tree that brings forth rotten fruit, or any rotten tree that produces good fruit.
44 Indeed, each tree is recognized by its own fruit!b People do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick up grapes from a bramble bush.
45 Out of the good treasure of his heart, a good person brings out what is good,

but out of the evil treasure of his heart, one who is evil brings out what is evil.
For out of the overflowing of the heart, the mouth speaks.

Day 18-Oct-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Apostle and Evangelist St Luke



He was a physician from Antioch, a disciple and traveling-companion of the Apostle Paul, who refers to him as the 'beloved physician.' He wrote not only his Gospel but the Acts of the Apostles, dedicating both to Theophilus, who according to one tradition was the Governor of Achaia, a convert. Much of the Acts of the Apostles is written in the first person, describing his own travels with the St Paul. He lived to an old age and died in Achaia, possibly in Patras. Most ancient authors say that he died as a Martyr.

Church traditions about St Luke are somewhat contradictory. According to many, he was one of the Seventy and thus an eye-witness to Christ's ministry on earth. (He is usually considered to be the companion of St Cleopas on the Road to Emmaus). According to others, he never met Christ himself but was converted by the preaching of the Apostle Paul. Church tradition holds that St Luke was the first iconographer, and painted an image of the Most Holy Theotokos from life. He is considered the patron of iconographers. Several icons attributed to St Luke himself are still in existence.

Martyr Marinus the Elder

Saint Peter, Metropolitan of Montenegro

Day 18-Oct-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Philippians 2:24-30; Luke 6:46-7:1
24 As it is, I trust in the Lord that I too will be able to come shortly.
25 Still, I deemed it necessary to send you Epaphroditus who is my brother, fellow-worker, fellow-soldier, and your apostle and the servant of my need.
26 He was longing for you all and was very troubled, because you had heard that he was sick.
27 Indeed, he was sick, almost to the point of death! But God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but also on me, so that I may not have sorrow upon sorrow.
28 And so, I have sent him all the more eagerly, so that you may rejoice when you see him again, and that I may be less sorrowful.
29 Receive him in the Lord with all joy, and hold such a person in honor,
30 because on account of the work of Christ, he came near to death, risking his life to provide what was lacking in your ministry to me.

Gospel Reading:
46 Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? 47 I will show you what the person is like who comes to me, hears my words and does them.
48 He is like a man building a house who dug and went deep, and laid a foundation on the rock.
When a flood arose, the water rushed against that house but could not shake it, because it was founded on the rock.
e 49 But the one who hears and does not practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation.
The stream rushed against it, and at once it fell down; and the ruin of that house was great.
7 The healing of the Centurion's servant When Jesus had finished speaking all that he wanted the people to hear, he entered into Capernaum.

Day 19-Oct-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Righteous John, Wonderworker of Kronstadt (1908).

"Saint John of Kronstadt was a married priest, who lived with his wife in virginity. Through his untiring labours in his priestly duties and love for the poor and sinners, he was granted by our Lord great gifts of clairvoyance and miracle-working, to such a degree that in the last years of his life miracles of healings — both of body and of soul — were performed countless times each day through his prayers, often for people who had only written to him asking his help. During his lifetime he was known throughout Russia, as well as in the Western world. He has left us his diary My Life in Christ as a spiritual treasure for Christians of every age; simple in language, it expounds the deepest mysteries of our Faith with that wisdom which is given only to a heart purified by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Foreseeing as a true prophet the Revolution of 1917, he unsparingly rebuked the growing apostasy among the people; he foretold that the very name of Russia would be changed. As the darkness of unbelief grew thicker, he shone forth as a beacon of unquenchable piety, comforting the faithful through the many miracles that he worked and the fatherly love and simplicity with which he received all. Saint John reposed in peace in 1908." (Great Horologion)

Holy Prophet Joel (8th c. BC)

His name means "The Lord is God." He is counted second among the "minor Prophets." The

Old Testament book of his prophecies, which bears his name, includes his prophecy of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Joel 2:28), which was quoted by the Apostle Peter (Acts 2:17).

Holy Martyr Varus and those with him (304)

"He was a Roman officer in Egypt and a secret Christian. When seven Christian teachers were thrown into prison, Varus kept visiting them there, supplying their needs and serving them with great devotion. He marvelled at the martyrs, and grieved that fear would not let him stand up as a martyr for Christ. These men of God gave him courage, and Varus made up his mind to go and be tortured with them. One of these godly men died in prison, and, when the wicked governor had the martyrs brought before him and saw that there were only six of them, he asked where the seventh was. 'I am the seventh!', cried Varus. The furious governor had him tortured first. He ordered that he be flogged with dry thongs, then that he be tied to a tree and hacked to pieces bit by bit with knives until he gave his holy soul to God. His body was

then thrown onto a dung-heap. A woman of Palestinian birth, Cleopatra, the widow of an officer, was there with her son John. She secretly took the relics of the holy martyr off the dung-heap and buried them in her house. She then asked the governor's permission to take the body of her dead husband back from Egypt to Palestine. As she was an officer's widow, the governor at once gave her permission. This blessed Christian woman, Cleopatra, however, took the body, not of her husband but of the holy martyr Varus, taking it to her village of Edra, near Tabor, and burying it there. She then built a church dedicated to St Varus, and he appeared to her often from the other world, resplendent as an angel of God." (Prologue)

Holy Hieromartyr Sadoth (Shahdost) and his 128 companions (342)

During the fierce persecution of Christians by the Persian King Shapur II, Saint Sadoth succeeded the Martyr Symeon (April 17) as Bishop of Seleucia. His name in Persian, Shah-dost, means 'Friend of the King'; but the earthly Shah saw him as no friend, and the holy bishop knew that his days on earth were numbered. One night in a dream, Sadoth saw a ladder reaching from earth to heaven. At the top stood Bishop Symeon, who called joyfully to him: 'Climb up, Sadoth, and do not be afraid! I climbed up yesterday; you will climb up today.' Waking, Sadoth knew that he would soon be called to martyrdom. He immediately set out to encourage his flock and to exhort them to stand firm for Christ in the coming day of persecution.

A few days later the persecutors came in the King's name to arrest the holy Bishop; with him they seized 128 priests, deacons, monks and simple believers. All were held in prison for five months, being brought forth repeatedly and tortured in ways too cruel to describe; but not a single one could be brought to worship the sun. Finally, all were condemned to die by the sword. The 128 martyrs, chained together, sang joyous hymns as they went to the place of execution. They did not cease to sing until the death of the last Martyr. Sadoth himself, however, was taken in chains to the city of Beit Lapat, where he was beheaded a few days later.

Saint John of Rilas

Venerable Prochorus of Pchinja

Felix the Hieromartyr and Eusebius the Deacon

Day 19-Oct-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Philippians 3:1-8; Luke 7:17-30

3 inally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord! To me, writing the same things to you is not tiresome- it is safe!

2 Beware of the dogs, beware of evilworkers, beware of the false circumcision!

3We are 'circumcised' if we offer divine service to God in the Spirit, [if we] rejoice in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh, 4 although I myself could have confidence even in the flesh! If anyone thinks that he has {a reason to have} confidence in the flesh, I could even more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews. As regards the law, I was a Pharisee; 6 as far as zeal is concerned, I was persecuting the Church, and as for the righteousness which is based on the law, [I was] found blameless.

7 However, these things which I thought were gain to me, I have counted as loss for Christ! 8 Yes, without a doubt, I consider all things as loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whom I suffered the loss of all things.

I consider them as dung, so that I may gain Christ

Gospel Reading:

17 This news concerning Jesus spread throughout Judea and in all the surrounding countryside.

Messengers from John the Baptist – The Lord's own witness about John 18 John's disciples told the Baptist about all these things.

19 John called two of his disciples and sent them to Jesus to ask, 'Are you the one who is coming, or should we look for another?'

20 When the men reached Jesus, they said, 'John the Baptizer has sent us to you, saying: 'Are you the one who is coming or should we look for another?" 21 At that very time, Jesus had been healing many diseases, plagues and evil spirits; and had given sight to many who were blind.

22 Jesus answered them, 'Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have Good News preached to them.

23 Blessed is he who is not offended by me!' 24 When John's messengers had departed, Jesus began to tell the multitudes about John, 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?

25 What then did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft clothing? Behold, those who are gorgeously dressed and live delicately are in kings' courts.
26 But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and much more than a prophet!
27 This is he of whom it is written: 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face,a who will prepare your way before you.
28 For I tell you, among those who are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptizer; yet whoever is least in the Kingdom of God is greater than he.
29 Hearing this, all the people and the tax collectors who had been baptized with John's baptism confessed God to be vindicated.
30 However, the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose,c not being baptized by him themselves.

Day 20-Oct-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Saint Gerasimus of Cephalonia
Saint Matrona the Wonderworker of Chios

Holy Great Martyr Artemius (362)

He came from a noble family, and was appointed military Governor of Alexandria and Egypt by the Emperor Constantine the Great. Some years later, the Emperor Julian the Apostate strove to restore pagan idolatry as the official religion of the Empire. He also entered into a war with Persia, and established Antioch as his headquarters for pursuing the war. In Alexandria, Artemius received an order to come to Antioch with the military forces under his command. Artemius reported to the apostate Emperor just in time to see him ordering the cruel execution of two pious Christians, Eugenius and Macarius. Fearlessly, St Artemius immediately denounced the Emperor, telling him to his face that his anti-Christian policy was of demonic origin. The enraged Emperor instantly had Artemius stripped of all official rank and thrown into prison. The following day, he had Artemius brought before him and promised him high Imperial office if he would only renounce Christ and worship the idols. When Artemius forcefully refused to do this, he was publicly tortured to death. A pious noblewoman secretly recovered the Saint's relics and took them to Constantinople, where they were venerated and wrought many miracles for several centuries.

St Gerasimus the New, ascetic of Cephalonia (1579)

He was born in southern Greece. As a young man he left home and, after traveling to seek out guides in the ascetic life, he came to Mt Athos, where he was tonsured as a monk. Some years later he went on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and there was ordained to the priesthood by Patriarch Germanus of Jerusalem. Once, while living in Jerusalem, he went into the Jordanian desert for forty days of fasting and prayer, in imitation of the Lord. After more travels through Sinai and Egypt, he came to the Greek island of Zakynthos, where he lived alone in an isolated cave, sustaining himself only on vegetables. But his holiness soon attracted many of the faithful, who came to him for blessing and counsel. Mindful of the advice that nothing is more harmful to a monk as the praise of men, he fled to the island of Cephalonia, where he again took up life in a secluded cave. But once again he became known, and even more pilgrims gathered around him in search of spiritual nurture. This time, God made known to him that he must leave his beloved solitude in order to minister to others; so he founded a monastery called New Jerusalem on the

island. St Gerasimus lived to a great age, and was granted foreknowledge of the day of his death. His relics are preserved on Cephalonia, "complete and incorrupt, as if he were asleep," according to the Synaxarion.

St Jonah, Bishop of Manchuria (1925) (October 7 OC)

Note: St Jonah's commemoration is October 7 on the Old Calendar, which falls on this day of the New Calendar.

He was orphaned in Russia at a young age, and, after attending the seminary in his home town of Kaluga, was tonsured as a monk at Optina Monastery. He was later ordained a priest, and taught in Kazan. In his thirtieth year (1918) the Bolsheviks seized power and he was forced to flee. After many persecutions and sufferings, he joined a large party of Russians who fled across Turkestan and the Gobi Desert into China. There he was made Bishop, and immediately began working tirelessly to encourage his flock and to provide for their material needs (most had arrived in China with only the clothes on their backs). He established churches, opened soup kitchens and an orphanage, cared personally for the sick, and in every way personified a true Minister of Christ.

When his death approached (from an infection acquired while caring for the sick) he donned his epitrachelion, read the Canon for the Departure of the Soul, lay down on his bed and said 'God's will be done. Now I shall die.' Within minutes he was dead. On the night of his funeral the Bishop appeared to a paralyzed ten-year-old boy, who was miraculously healed.

Day 20-Oct-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Philippians 3:8-19; Luke 7:31-35
8 Yes, without a doubt, I consider all things as loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whom I suffered the loss of all things.
I consider them as dung, so that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own (from the law), but through faith in Christ (the righteousness which is from God by faith).
10 Yes, may I know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the communion of his sufferings, becoming conformed to his death, 11 if by any means I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.
12 I am not saying that I have already obtained these things or that I am already made perfect; but I press on to take hold of [the prize] for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.
13 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having obtained these things just yet, but I do this: forgetting the things which are now behind and reaching forward to the things which are before [me], 14 I press on toward the goal, and the prize is the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.
15 Let us who are mature, therefore, think this way, and if you think differently in some way, God will also reveal that to you.
16 Nevertheless, to the extent that we have already reached some point, let us walk by the same rule and let us be of the same mind.
17 Brethren, be united in imitating me, and keep your eyes fixed on those who live this way, even as you have us as an example.
18 But there are many who live as enemies of the cross of Christ, as I remind you often, as I do [even] now with tears.
19 Their end is destruction, their god is the belly, and their glory is in their shame as they think about earthly things.
Gospel reading:

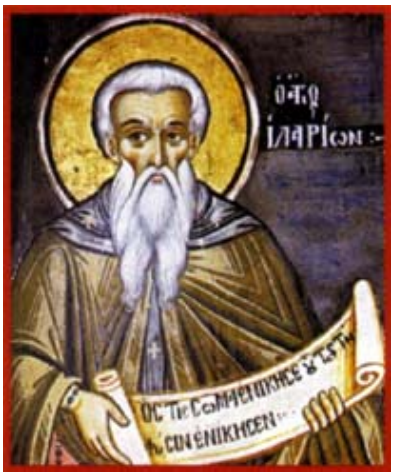
31 'To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? 32 They are like children who sit in the marketplace and who call one another, saying: 'We played the pipes to you, and you did not dance! We mourned, and you did not cry!'
33 For John the Baptizer came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon!'
34 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Behold, a glutton and

a drunkard; a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' 35 Yet Wisdom is justified by all her children.

Day 21-Oct-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

St Hilarion the Great of Palestine (371)



He was born in Palestine to pagan parents who sent him to Alexandria to be educated. There he learned of the Christian faith and was baptized. Hearing of the fame of St Anthony the Great, he met the great "Father of monks," and determined to devote himself to the ascetical life. For the rest of his life he traveled from place to place, engaging in the most austere life of solitude, prayer and fasting. But wherever he went, his holiness shone like a beacon, and he became known to the people, who flocked to him for counsel, nurture and healing. He would then flee to another place and begin again. His travels took him to Egypt, Libya, Sicily, and finally Cyprus, where he reposed at a great age. As he lay on his deathbed, he cried out 'Go forth, O my soul. What do you fear? Go forth! Why are you disquieted within me? You have served Jesus Christ for almost seventy years and do you fear death?' Speaking these words, he died.

The Synaxarion gives an excruciatingly thorough description of his ascetical labors, which may be instructive:

"From his sixteenth to his twentieth year, Hilarion's shelter was a simple cabin made of bulrushes and marsh grasses. Afterwards, he built a little, low cell that looked more like a tomb than a house. He lay on the hard ground, and washed and cut his hair only once a year, on Easter day. He never washed the coat of skin that Saint Anthony gave him, and wore the same tunic until it fell to pieces. He knew all of Holy Scripture by heart and recited it aloud, standing with fear, as though God were visibly present. From his twenty-first to his twenty-seventh year, a few lentils soaked in cold water was, for three years, his daily food, and for the next three he took nothing but bread, sprinkled with salt. From his twenty-seventh to his thirtieth year, he lived on wild plants; from the age of thirty to thirty-five, on six ounces of barley bread and a few vegetables, cooked without oil. Then, falling ill and with failing eyesight, he added a little oil to his food but did not increase his allowance of bread, even though he saw his body grow weaker, and believed his death was near. At an age when others tend to decrease their austerities, he kept to this diet with redoubled fervor, like a young novice, until his death. He never ate

until after sunset and relinquished his fast neither for the greatest feasts nor the gravest illnesses."

Holy New Martyr John of Monembasia (1773)

"Saint John was from Monembasia in the Peloponnese. At that time the region was under the Turkish yoke and subject to frequent raids from Albanians who captured Christians to sell them as slaves. In the course of one such attack, John's father was killed and the young boy and his mother were taken as captives to Larissa, where they were sold to a Turk from Thessalonica. This man, who had no son, wanted to adopt John and make him a Muslim. But nothing was able to persuade the fifteen-year-old youth: attractive promises, threatened beatings, the magic arts the Turk's wife used to make him lose his chastity, all were in vain. John remained as immovable as a rock and preferred to starve for days on end than break the fasts of the Church. The Turk became enraged at his failure to prevail over his young slave, and ran a sword into his stomach. For two days John suffered in agony before he departed to the abode of the blessed." (Synaxarion)

Saint Hilarion, Bishop of Meglin

Our Righteous Father Christodoulus, the Wonderworker of Patmos

Venerable Philotheus the Athonite

Day 21-Oct-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: 2 Corinthians 1:8-11; Luke 5:27-32

8 For we do not desire to have you uninformed, brethren, concerning our affliction which happened to us in Asia: we were extremely oppressed, beyond our power, so much that we even despaired of life.
9 Yes, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we should not trust in ourselves but [only] in God who raises the dead.
10 He who delivered us from such a great death and continued to deliver; we hope that he will also deliver us.
11 You also help by your supplication on our behalf; so that thanksgiving will be offered for the gift bestowed on us by means of many.

Gospel Reading:

27 After these things, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at the tax office.
He said to him, 'Follow me!' 28 Levi left everything, got up and began to follow Jesus.
29 He made a great feast for Jesus in his house.
A great crowd of tax collectors was [assembled] there, and other people were also at table with them.
30 The scribes and the Pharisees murmured against Jesus' disciples, saying, 'Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?' 31 Jesus answered them, 'Those who are healthy have no need for a physician, but those who are sick do! 32 I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Day 22-Oct-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Icon of Kazan and the Liberation of Moscow with the help of the Most-holy Theotokos

St Abercius, Bishop of Hierapolis, Wonderworker and Equal to the Apostles (167)

He was bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia of Asia Minor, during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, a persecutor of Christians. During a pagan festival, Abercius was instructed by an Angel to throw down the idols of Apollo and other pagan gods. When his work was discovered, the people of the city were outraged; but instead of hiding, the bishop went to the marketplace and openly confessed the Christian faith. The people grew angrier still, but when Abercius healed three possessed men they were amazed and listened to him more closely. He preached the Faith with such power that the entire city and surrounding countryside became Christian.

These miracles reached the ears of the Emperor, whose daughter was suffering from demonic possession. The Emperor summoned Abercius to Rome, where he was enabled to cast out the spirit and perform several other miracles. The Empress offered him a large reward of gold for healing her daughter, but he would not accept it. On his way home, he was instructed in a vision to travel to Syria. He travelled first to Antioch and surrounding cities, then as far as Mesopotamia, proclaiming Christ and teaching the faith everywhere he went. No other bishop of his time travelled so widely in the service of the Gospel; for this reason he is called Equal to the Apostles.

After several years he returned to Phrygia, where he lived the remainder of his life in peace, shepherding his flock.

Venerable Lot of Egypt (5th c.)

He was one of the company of ascetic Fathers who fled the world into the Egyptian desert in the fourth and fifth centuries.

Once Abba Lot went to his spiritual father Joseph and asked him, simply, 'What shall I do to be saved?' Abba Joseph stretched his hands toward heaven and his fingers became ten flames. He said, 'If you desire it, you can become entirely as a fire.'

A brother once came to Abba Lot in terrible distress and said to him, 'I have committed a great sin, that I cannot admit to the Fathers.' 'Confess it to me and I will bear it for you,' answered the Elder. 'I have fallen into fornication,' the brother said, 'and to do so, I sacrificed to idols.' The Elder said to him, 'Take heart: no sin is beyond God's mercy. Repentance is always possible. Go and sit in your cave; eat only every other day, and we will each take an equal

share of the burden of your offence.' After three weeks of keeping the same penance, Abba Lot received assurance from God that the brother's repentance was acceptable. For the rest of his life, the brother served as the Elder's disciple.

Holy Seven Youths of Ephesus

They are also commemorated August 4. See that date for their story.

Day 22-Oct-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

The Healing of Gadarene Demonic
Ephesians 2:4-10: Luke 8:26-39
4 But God who is rich in mercy, on account of his great love by which he loved us,
5 even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.
By grace you have been saved! 6 Godd raised us up with him, and granted us to sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the ages to come, he might show the overflowing treasure of his grace in kindness toward us, in Christ Jesus.
8 Yes, by grace you have been saved through faith, not by yourselves.
It is the gift of God, 9 not of works, so that no one would boast.
10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in advance for us to walk in them.

Gospel Reading: The Healing of Gadarene Demonic

26 Then, they reached the country of the Gadarenes, which is opposite Galilee.
27 When Jesus stepped ashore, a man from the town who had had demons for a long time came to meet him.
cThis man wore no clothes, and he did not live in a house, but in the tombs.
28 When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him.
With a loud voice, he said, 'What do you want from me, Jesus, you Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me!' 29 (For Jesus was commanding the unclean spirit to come out of the man).
The unclean spirit had often seized the man and he was kept under guard, bound with chains and fetters.
[But he had been] breaking the chains and was driven by the demon into deserted places.
30 Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?' He replied, 'Legion,' for many demons

had entered into him.
31 And they begged him not to command them to go into the abyss.
32 Now, there was a large herd of swine feeding on the mountain, and the demonse begged him that he would allow them to enter into those [pigs]; and Jesus allowed them.
33 The demons came out from the man and entered into the pigs.
Then the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and [the swine] were drowned.
34 When the people who fed the pigs saw what had happened, they fled and told the story in the city and in the countryside.
35 Then, people went out to see what had happened.
They came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone out.
He was sitting at Jesus' feet, clothed and in his right mind; and they were afraid.
36 Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been delivered.
37 All the people of the surrounding country of the Gadarenes asked Jesusg to depart from them, because they were extremely afraid.
So he got into the boat and went back.
38 The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with Jesus, but Jesus sent him away, saying: 39 'Return to your house and proclaim what great things God has done for you.
So the man went on his way, proclaiming throughout the whole city what great things Jesus had done for him.

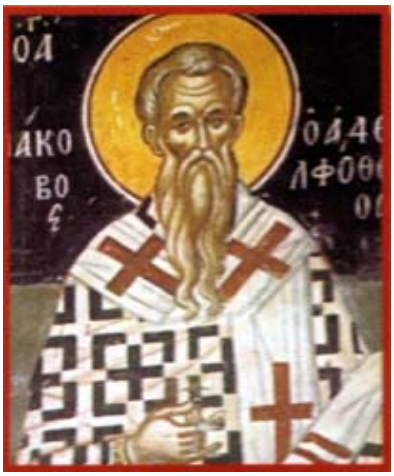
SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING
Legion represents an interesting story telling device used by the early church to help us to better contemplate the work of God.
In Matthews Gospel there are two demoniacs healed by Christ and the demons sent into a herd of Swine, whereas in Mark and Luke's Gospels the demoniacs are combined into a single figure called Legion.
This indicates that the story had undergone some changes in order for us to better understand and contemplate them.
As individuals it is easier for us to identify with one person than with two people.
Archimandrite Aemilianos in his book "The way of the Spirit," suggests the idea that some of the stories in the New Testament, such as of the prodigal son, were told in such a way as to promote the contemplation of the "soul in exile." (p. 2-3).
We can better contemplate his vicissitudes and empathise with him, and his circumstances, by thinking of him as a single character, although it might refer to many.
Our hope and trust in the work of God becomes more developed thereby, in considering that in isolation and despair God can still find us and restore us to a right mind.
That he can sit with us, and talk with us.

No matter the evil within us, or perpetrated by us, God is at hand to help.
The soul in exile is a stern reminder though that our transformation is a life-long process (indeed it will continue in the afterlife) rather than the stuff of easy televised miracles of deliverance.
Our understanding that we are the much– loved children of God requiring restoration to sonhood, is the beginning not the end of such process.
The long journey home is one of patient endurance, and persistence.
Persistence in prayer, persistence in trust.
Persistence often through continued quiet despair.
A continual rediscovering of God and of ourselves.

Day 23-Oct-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Apostle James, the Brother of the Lord and First Bishop of Jerusalem (63)



His Hebrew name is Jacob. He was a close kinsman of Christ, and was therefore called, according to the Jewish usage of the time, his "brother." Some accounts say that he was a child of Joseph by his first marriage; others accounts say that he was the son of Joseph's brother Cleopas and his wife Mary, who was first cousin of the Theotokos. He took the Nazirite vows of one completely consecrated to God according to the Law, and from a young age he was called "the Just" by his people. He is called James the Lesser in Scripture (Mark 15:40) to distinguish him from James the son of Zebedee, who is called the Greater. The Apostles appointed him first Bishop of Jerusalem. It was he who presided at the earliest Council of the Church in Jerusalem, where he resolved the problem of how gentile converts should be received into the Church (see Acts 15). He wrote the New Testament Epistle, addressed primarily to Jewish converts to the Faith, that bears his name. About the year 62, he ascended to the peak of the Temple in Jerusalem on Passover, and there bore witness to Christ so effectively that the people cried out "Hosanna to the Son of David." At this, the Scribes and Pharisees, fearing that all the people would be converted to Christ, cast him down to the ground. By God's grace, he survived long enough to rise, kneel and pray, like his Master, "Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do." He was then clubbed to death by one of the scribes.

Saint Macarius the Roman of Mesopotamia (?)

"Three holy men who lived in ascesis in the Monastery of St Asclepius in Mesopotamia decided to walk up and down the world in search of a sign from God for their salvation. As they approached a cave, deep in the wilderness, they became aware all at once of a marvellous scent and saw an old man coming towards them covered only by his hair and the beard that fell to his knees. He cast himself to the earth and remained there for a while, until he was sure the three strangers were not demons. Then he brought them into his cave, where he lived with two lions. They asked him to tell them his story, which he did.

"His name was Macarius, the son of a rich senator of Rome. When he reached marriageable age, his parents betrothed him against his will. On his

wedding night, at the moment of entering the bridal chamber in the midst of the festivities, he fled to a pious widow's, where he spent seven days in hiding, weeping and entreating the help of God. As he left her house, an old man of kindly and noble demeanour came by, and told him to follow. And, indeed, Macarius followed him for three years, until the moment of arrival near the cave, when the old man vanished. He appeared to Macarius in a dream soon after, and revealed that he was the Archangel Raphael, who had once been the guide of Tobias in his travels. Before departing, the Archangel entrusted him to the care of God and of two lion cubs that had just lost their mother.

"Some while after, Macarius saw, standing before him, a most beautiful maiden, who told him that she too had fled marriage in Rome. Macarius did not have discernment enough to escape the Devil's trap, and welcomed her to spend the night in his cave. During the night, he was violently attacked, for the first time in his life, by the fiery darts of carnal desire. The pretended maiden suddenly disappeared, as the Devil triumphed in his success at introducing the thought of sin into the mind of the ascetic. Macarius then realized the gravity of his fall in the sight of God. Weeping bitterly, he made up his mind to leave the cave and find somewhere else to do penance. But, on his way, the Archangel Raphael appeared to him anew and urged him to return, for it was in his cave that God would hear his prayer. So he went back and sorely afflicted his flesh with fasting, vigils and utter abnegation for many years, in order to regain a heart of unsullied purity in which to contemplate the image of God.

"When he had edified the three brethren with the story of his struggles, Macarius sent them away in peace and fell asleep in the Lord, unknown to all, in the presence only of the angels and the saints." (Synaxarion)

Not even the century of the Saint's life is given in our sources.

Saint Ignatius, Patriarch of Constantinople

Holy Martyr James of Borovichi (Relics)

Day 23-Oct-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Philippians 4:10-23; Luke 7:36-50
Paul's needs and thankfulness 10 But now, I rejoice in the Lord greatly, that your consideration for me has blossomed again! (I know that you were thinking about me but lacked the opportunity).
11 I do not want to speak about what I lack, because I have learned to be satisfied with whatever state I am in! 12 I know how to be humbled, and I also know also how to overflow.
In everything and in all things I have learned the secret of being both filled and hungry, to be in abundance and to be in need.
13 I can do all these things through Christ who strengthens me.
14 However, it was a good thing that you shared in my affliction.
15 As you Philippians know well, in the beginning of the Good News when I departed from Macedonia, no Church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving – only you did! 16 For even [when I was] in Thessalonica you supplied for my needs.
17 It is not that I seek the gift, what I value is the interest that is accumulating in your account! 18 I actually have all things and I overflow since I received from Epaphroditus what came from you, a sweet-smelling fragrance, an acceptable and well-pleasing sacrifice to God! 19 My God will supply all of your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.
20 To our God and Father be the glory unto ages of ages! Amen.
21Greet every saint in Christ Jesus! The brethren who are with me greet you.
22 All the saints greet you, especially those who are of Caesar's household.
23 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all! Amen.

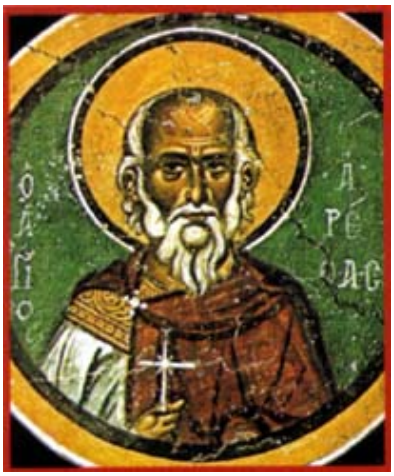
Gospel reading:
36 One of the Pharisees invited Jesus to eat with him.
He entered into the Pharisee's house, and sat at the table.
37 And behold, a woman who was a sinner in the city, when she learned that he was at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of perfume.
38 Standing behind at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and she wiped them with the hair of her head.
She also kissed his feet and anointed them with the perfumed oil.
39 Now, when the Pharisee who had invited Jesus saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would have perceived who is touching him and what kind of woman this is, that she is a sinner.

40 Jesus said to him, 'Simon, I have something to tell you.
He replied, 'Speak, teacher.
41 'A certain lender had two debtors.
One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.
42 When they could not pay, he forgave them both.
Then, which of them will love him the most?' 43 Simon answered, 'The one to whom he forgave the most I suppose.
Jesus said to him, 'You have judged correctly.
44 Turning to the woman, he said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I entered into your house, and you gave me no water for my feet; but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with the her hair.
45 You gave me no kiss, but since the time I came in, she has not ceased kissing my feet.
46 You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with perfume.
47 Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven because she has loved much.
But the one to whom little is forgiven loves little.
48 Jesus said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.
49 Those who sat at the table with him began to say to themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?' 50 Then Jesus said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you.
Go in peace.

Day 24-Oct-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Holy Martyr Arethas and those with him (524)



'These Martyrs contested for piety's sake in the year 524 in Najran, a city of Arabia Felix (present-day Yemen). When Dhu Nuwas, ruler of the Himyarite tribe in south Arabia, and a Judaizer, took power, he sought to blot out Christianity, especially at Najran, a Christian city. Against the counsels of Arethas, chief man of Najran, the city surrendered to Dhu Nuwas, who immediately broke the word he had given and sought to compel the city to renounce Christ. Led by Saint Arethas, hundreds of martyrs, including women, children, and babes, valiantly withstood his threats, and were beheaded and burned. After the men had been slain, all the free-born Christian women of Najran were brought before the tyrant and commanded to abjure Christ or die; yet they rebuked the persecutor with such boldness that he said even the men had not insulted him so contemptuously. So great was their faith that not one woman was found to deny Christ in all Najran, although some of them suffered torments more bitter than most of the men. In alliance with Byzantium, the Ethiopian King Elesbaan liberated Najran from Dhu Nuwas soon after and raised up churches in honour of the Martyrs. Najran became a place of pilgrimage until the rise of Islam a century later. At the end of his life King Elesbaan, who was also called Caleb, retired into solitude as a hermit; he sent his crown to Jerusalem as an offering to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. He also is commemorated on this day as a saint. Saint Arethas' name in Arabic, Harith, means "plowman, tiller," much the same as "George" in Greek.' (Great Horologion)

Ethiopia is still a Christian nation, surrounded by Islamic states. The late Emperor Haile Selasse's name means, in Ethiopian, "Power of the Trinity."

Saint Elesban, King of Ethiopia
Holy Martyr Sebastiana of Heraclea
Venerable Arethas of the Monastery of the Kiev Caves

Day 24-Oct-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Colossians 1:1, 2, 7-11; Luke 8:1-3

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God, and Timothy our brother,
2 to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
3 We give thanks to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we always pray for you. 4 We have heard about your faith in Christ Jesus and about the love which you have for all the saints, 5 because of the hope which is prepared for you in heaven. Of this hope you have heard before in the word of the truth of the Good News
6 which has come to you; even as it is [spreading] in the whole world. It has been bearing fruit and growing [everywhere], as it has done in you too since the day you heard and experienced the grace of God in truth.
7 This is what you also learned from Epaphras, our beloved fellow-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf. 8 He has informed us of your love in [the] Spirit. 9 For this reason, since the day we heard this, we do not cease praying and making requests for you, so that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.
10 We also pray that you may walk worthily of the Lord, to please him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God. 11 May you be strengthened with all power, according to the might of his glory, [to be prepared] for all [kinds of] endurance and perseverance with joy!

Gospel Reading:

8 The women disciples of the Lord Soon afterwards, Jesus went through cities and villages, preaching and bringing the Good News of the Kingdom of God. With him were the Twelve,
2 and certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out;
3 Joanna, the wife of Chuzas, Herod's steward; Susanna; and many others; who served him from their possessions.

Day 25-Oct-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Martyrs Marcian and Martyrius (346)

Both lived in Constantinople and were disciples of the Patriarch St Paul the Confessor (November 6), who was murdered in exile by the Arians. During the reign of the Arian Emperor Constantius, they fearlessly confessed that the Son of God is of one essence with the Father and is truly God. For their confession they were beheaded by the Arians and buried outside the city. Soon afterward, miracles began to be wrought at their tomb, and St John Chrysostom later built a church over it.

St Tabitha of Joppa

She was restored to life by the Apostle Peter (Acts 9:39-40), and afterwards died in peace.

Holy Martyr Anastasius

Day 25-Oct-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Colossians 1:18-23; Luke 8:22-25
18 He is the head of the body, the Church; [he is] the first cause, the firstborn from the dead, so that in all [things] he might have the first place.
19 For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile all things to himself, both earthly and heavenly, having made peace through the blood of his cross.
21 In the past, you were alienated and hostile in mind in your evil actions.
22 But now, he has reconciled [you] in the body of his flesh through death, in order to present you holy, without blemish and blameless before him.
23 This is [for you] if you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, not moved away from the hope of the Good News which you heard.
I, Paul, became a servant of this Good News that is being proclaimed throughout all creation under heaven.

Gospel Reading:
22 On one of those days, he entered into a boat with his disciples and said to them, 'Let us go over to the other side of the lake.
And so, they launched out.
23 But as they were sailing, Jesus fell asleep.
A windstorm came down on the lake, and they were taking on dangerous amounts of water.
24 His disciples came to him and woke him up, saying, 'Master, master, we are perishing!' Jesus awoke, rebuked the wind and the raging of the water, and they ceased, and it was calm.
25 He said to them, 'Where is your faith?' In fear and amazement, they said to one another, 'Who is this, then, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?'

Day 26-Oct-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Holy, Glorious and Great Martyr Demetrius the Outpourer of Myrrh (306)

This glorious and wonderworking saint was born in Thessalonica of noble and devout parents. Implored of God by childless parents, Demetrios was their only son, and so was raised and educated with great care. Demetrios's father was a commander in Thessalonica. When his father died, Emperor Maximian appointed Demetrios as commander in his place. As he appointed him, Maximian, an opponent of Christ, particularly recommended that he persecute and exterminate the Christians in Thessalonica. Demetrios not only disobeyed the emperor but openly confessed and preached the Lord Jesus Christ in the city of Thessalonica. When the emperor heard of this he became furious with Demetrios. Then, when he was returning from battle against the Sarmatians, Maximian stopped at Thessalonica to investigate the matter. The emperor summoned Demetrios and questioned him about his faith. Demetrios openly acknowledged his Christian Faith to the emperor and also denounced the emperor's idolatry. Maximian cast Demetrios into prison. Knowing what was awaiting him, Demetrios gave all his goods to his faithful servant Lupus to distribute to the poor, and joyfully awaited his imminent suffering for Christ the Lord. An angel of God appeared to him in prison, saying: 'Peace be to you, O sufferer of Christ; be brave and be strong!' After several days, the emperor sent soldiers to the prison to kill Demetrios. The soldiers found the saint of God at prayer and ran him through with lances. Christians secretly took his body and honorably buried it. Healing myrrh flowed from the body of the martyr of Christ, curing many of the sick. Soon, a small church was built over his relics.

An Illyrian nobleman, Leontius, was afflicted with an incurable illness. He hastened, with prayer, to the relics of St. Demetrios and was completely healed. In thanksgiving, Leontius erected a much larger church on the site of the old church. The saint appeared to him on two occasions. When Emperor Justinian wanted to translate the relics of the saint from Thessalonica to Constantinople, flaming sparks sprang from the tomb and a voice was heard: 'Stop, and do not touch!' And thus, the relics of St. Demetrios have remained

for all time in Thessalonica. As the protector of Thessalonica, St. Demetrios has appeared many times, and on many occasions has saved Thessalonica from great calamity. His miracles are without number. The Russians considered St. Demetrios to be the protector of Siberia, which was conquered and annexed to Russia on October 26, 1581.

Source: St. Nikolai Velimirovic, The Prologue of Ohrid – Volume Two.

Apolytikion

The world has found in you a great champion in time of peril, as you emerged the victor in routing the barbarians. For as you brought to naught the boasts of Lyaios, imparting courage to Nestor in the stadium, in like manner, holy one, great Martyr Demetrios, invoke Christ God for us, that He may grant us His great mercy.

Kontakion

God, who gave you invincible power and with care kept your city invulnerable, royally clothed the Church in purple with the streams of your blood, for you are her strength, O Demetrios.

Commemoration of the Great Earthquake of Constantinople
Venerable Athanasius of Medikion
Joasaph the New Martyr

Day 26-Oct-2023 Thursday

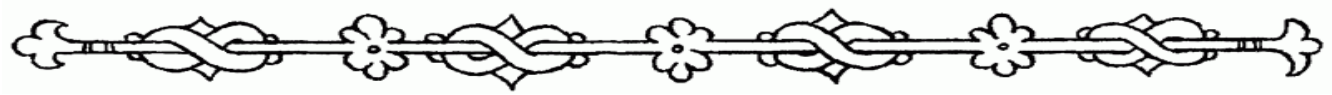
Fast Free

Readings of the day: Colossians 1:24-29; Luke 9:7-11

24 Now, I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh, I complete what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ for the sake of his body which is the Church.
25 I have become her servant, according to God's commission which was I received for you, in order to fulfil the word of God.
26 This is the mystery which was hidden for ages and generations.
But now, it has been revealed to his saints.
27 To them, God was pleased to reveal the glorious generosity of this mystery among the Gentiles.
This mystery is Christ in you, the hope of glory.
28 This is what we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ Jesus.
29 This is what I also work for, struggling with his energy which is powerfully at work in me.

Gospel Reading:

7 Now, Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was done by Jesus.
He was very perplexed, because it was said by some that John had risen from the dead.
8 Some said that Elias (Elijah) had appeared, and others that one of the old prophets had risen again.
9 Herod said, 'I have beheaded John, but who is this about whom I hear such things?' And he desired to see Jesus.
10 When they returned, the apostles told him what things they had done.
Then, Jesus took them with him, and they withdrew to a deserted place [which was part] of a city called Bethsaida.
11 However, the crowd perceived this and followed him.
Jesus welcomed them, speaking to them about the Kingdom of God, and curing those who needed healing.



Day 27-Oct-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Martyr Nestor, Companion of St Demetrius (306)

See St Demetrius, commemorated yesterday, October 26.
St Procla, the wife of Pontius Pilate.
When Pilate was about to judge Christ, Procla attempted to dissuade him, saying "Have nothing to do with that just man, for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him." Pilate ignored her warning. (See Matthew 27). St Procla reposed in peace.
Our Venerable Father Demetrius of Basarabov (Romania) (13th c.)

He was born early in the thirteenth century to a peasant family in the village of Basarov, then part of Bulgaria. Even in childhood, he gave himself to fasting and prayer. Once, walking across a field, he accidentally stepped on a bird's nest in the grass, killing the young birds. He was so filled with remorse that he went barefoot for three years, winter and summer, in penance. When he was grown he joined a monastery and, after a few years of community life, received a blessing to dwell in a cave near the River Lom. After many years of solitary struggle, he reposed in his cave. Three hundred years passed, during which all memory of the simple ascetic was lost. Then, one Spring the river flooded the cave and carried off Demetrius' body, which

had lain incorrupt in the cave for centuries. The body was carried downstream and buried in gravel. Another hundred years went by, and the Saint appeared in a dream to a paralyzed girl, telling her to ask her parents to take her to the river bank, where she would be healed. The family, along with many clergy and villagers, went to a spot where some local people had earlier seen an unexplained light. They dug and soon unearthed the still-incorrupt and radiant body of St Demetrius, by which the girl was instantly healed. A church was built in the village of Basarabov to honor the precious relics, and through the years the Saint worked many miracles there.

In 1774, during the Russian-Turkish war, General Peter Saltikov ordered the holy relics taken to Russia so that they would not be desecrated by the Turks. When the relics came to Bucharest, a pious Christian friend of the General begged him not to deprive the country of one of its most precious saints; so the General took only one of the Saint's hands, sending it to the Kiev Caves Lavra. Saint Demetrius' body was placed in the cathedral of Bucharest, where it has been venerated ever since. Every year on October 27, a three-day festival is held in the Saint's honor, attended by crowds of the faithful.

Cyriacus, Patriarch of Constanstinople
Venerable Nestor the Chronicler
Saint Andrew, Prince of Smolensk

Day 27-Oct-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Colossians 2:1-7; Luke 9:12-18
I want you to know how greatly I struggle for you, for those at Laodicea, and even for all those who do not know me in person.
2 Yes, I struggle so that their hearts may be comforted and for them to be united in love, obtaining the treasure that is in the full assurance of understanding, so that they may know the mystery of God the Father and of Christ.
3 In him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge! 4 Now, I say these things so that no one may delude you with convincing words.
5Although I am physically absent, I am spiritually present with you, rejoicing and seeing your order, as well as the solidity of your faith in Christ.
6 As you received Christ Jesus as the Lord, walk also in him, 7 rooted and built up in him, established in the faith just as you were taught, overflowing from faith into thanksgiving.
Gospel reading:

12 Late in the afternoon, the Twelve came to him and said, 'Send the people away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and farms to find lodging and get food, for we are here in a deserted place.
13 But Jesus said to them, 'You give them something to eat.
They replied, 'We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless we go and buy food for all these people.
14 (For they were about five thousand men).
Jesus then said to his disciples, 'Make them sit down in groups of about fifty each.
15 They did so, and made them all sit down.
16 He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he blessed them, and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the multitude.
17 Everybody ate, and all were satisfied.
The disciples gathered up twelve baskets of broken pieces that were left over.
Peter's confession of faith – The Lord's passion is announced 18 Once, as Jesus was praying alone and the disciples were with him, he asked them, 'Who do the multitudes say that I am?'

Day 28-Oct-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

St Dimitri (Demetrius) of Rostov (1709)

Born near Kiev, he was raised in piety and, at the early age of eleven, entered the Ecclesiastical Academy of Kiev. At the age of seventeen he was professed as a monk. A few years later he was ordained to the priesthood. Despite his constant desire to retire into a life of asceticism and solitude, his many gifts were needed by the Church and, much against his will, he spent most of his life engaged in writing and other labors. The Abbot of the Lavra of the Kiev Caves, knowing his scholarly abilities, called him to compile a Russian-language Lives of the Saints, a work to which he devoted himself tirelessly for twenty-five years.

This compilation was not a dry exercise for him; he approached each Saint's life with prayer, and was often granted visions. The holy Martyr Barbara appeared to him in his sleep in 1685; when he asked her to intercede for him to the Lord, she chided him for praying "in the Latin Way," that is, for using short prayers. Seeing his distress at being so rebuked, she smiled and said "Do not be afraid!"

St Demetrius was elevated to the episcopal throne (of Metropolitan of Tobolsk and Siberia) in 1701, but asked to be transferred due to ill health, and because the Siberian see would not allow him to continue his research. So he was appointed to the Diocese of Rostov in 1702; he received a divine revelation that he would end his years there. He completed his monumental Lives of the Saints in 1705; thereafter he devoted his energies to the care of his flock, the education of priests, and many spiritual writings, including several addressed to the schismatic "Old Believers," pleading with them to rejoin the canonical Church.

Despite his poor health, he maintained a life of strict prayer and fasting, and encouraged his faithful, in his sermons and writings, to do the same. He predicted his own death three days beforehand. The Synaxarion concludes: "the holy Bishop fell at the feet of his servants and chanters, and asked their forgiveness. Then, with an ardent prayer on his lips, he shut himself in his cell. The next morning, 28 October 1709, they discovered him dead upon his knees. The relics of Saint Demetrius were found incorrupt in 1752 and they wrought many healings. He was formally glorified by the Church in 1757."

Our Holy Father Firmilian, Bishop of Caesarea (268)

Born to a noble family of Caesarea in Cappadocia, he studied under Origen with his friend St Gregory the Wonderworker (November 17). He became

Bishop of Caesarea around 230. In 252 he took part in the Council of Antioch, which condemned the schismatic Novatian and his followers, who denied all hope of repentance and restoration to the Church for those who had denied the Faith to avoid persecution.

Firmilian devoted much energy to defending the churches of Asia and Africa from unlawful domination by Pope Stephen of Rome. The Asian and African churches baptized heretics who returned to the Church; Rome reconciled them simply by the laying on of hands. Firmilian did not condemn the Roman practice, but zealously defended the local churches' right to keep their practice, rather than have the Pope dictate the practices of the entire Church.

The holy Bishop was then called upon to combat the heresy of Paul of Samosata, Bishop of Antioch. Paul taught that the Word of God is not one in essence with the Father, but is only a word of divine inspiration sent to the man Jesus. (This is undoubtedly the belief of many 'Christians' today!) Seeing in this teaching a complete denial of our salvation in Christ, fully man and fully God, Firmilian called three successive Councils (in 263, 266 and 268) to deal with the heresy. The first two were undermined by Paul and his party; but at the third the heresy was finally condemned and Paul of Samosata excommunicated. Saint Firmilian died in the city of Tarsus while traveling to this Council.

Holy Hieromartyr Cyriacus, Bishop of Jerusalem, and his mother Anna (4th c.)

Cyriacus was born a Jew and bore the name Judas before believing in Christ. He was one of the workers employed by Saint Helena when she came to Jerusalem to uncover the Cross of Christ. Thus, he was an eye-witness to the Cross' discovery and the many miracles wrought by it; he believed in Christ, was baptized, and in time became a Bishop in the Church of Jerusalem. He lived into the reign of Julian the Apostate (361-363). The tyrannical Emperor, who was passing through Palestine on the way to Persia (where he would die), had the holy bishop seized and subjected to horrid tortures to force him to deny Christ. Cyriacus' mother Anna rushed to his side to encourage him and bid him farewell; she also was seized, and the two gave up their souls to God on the same day.

Holy Protection of the Theotokos

Holy Martyrs Terrence and Eunice

Saint Athanasius, Patriarch of Constantinople

Saint Arsenije, Archbishop of Pec

Saint Stephen of St. Sava’s

Angelis, Manuel, George and Nicholas the New Martyrs of Crete

Day 28-Oct-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: 2 Corinthians 3:12-18; Luke 6:1-10

12 Since we have such a hope, we use great boldness of speech, 13 not as Moses, who put a veil on his face so that the children of Israel would not see the end of what was passing away.
14 In this case, their minds were hardened, because to this very day, at the reading of the old covenant, the same veil remains since only in Christ does it pass away.
15 Even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart.
16 But whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.
17 Now, the Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.
18 With unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, we are all being transformed into the same image, from glory to glory, and this is from the Lord, the Spirit.

Gospel Reading:

On a certain Sabbath day, Jesus was walking through the grain fields.
His disciples plucked heads of grain and ate them, rubbing the heads in their hands.
2But some among the Pharisees asked them, 'Why do you do what is not lawful on the Sabbath day?' 3Jesus answered them with these words, 'Have not you read what David did when he was hungry, along with those who were with him? 4How he entered into the house of God, took and ate the show bread and also gave it to those who were with him, even though it is not lawful to eat [from it] except for the priests alone?' 5He said to them, 'The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.
6 On another Sabbath, Jesus entered into the synagogue and began to teach.
A man was there whose right hand was withered.
7 The scribes and the Pharisees were watching Jesus,c to see if he would heal on the Sabbath, so that they might find an accusation against him.
8 But Jesus perceived their thoughts.
He said to the man who had the withered hand, 'Rise up, and stand in the midst [of all];' and the man arose and stood up.
9 Then Jesus said to them, 'I will ask you something: Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath, or to do harm? To save a life, or to kill?' 10 He looked around at all of

them and said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand!' The man did so, and his hand was restored as healthy as the other.

Day 29-Oct-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Holy Virgin Martyr Anastasia of Rome (256)

Saint Anastasia+ lived at Rome in the middle of the third century, during the reign of the Emperor Decius and of his successor Valerian, when Probus was Governor of the City. She was young and beautiful and possessed all the good things of this life, whose pleasures tend to make us forget heavenly things. But she gave up everything that bound her to this world and embraced the angelic life in a little monastery in Rome, directed by a wise and most virtuous nun called Sophia. When the Devil saw the young Anastasia warring valiantly against fleshly passions, he decided to tempt her by the final test of confessing Christ in the shedding of her blood. Her refusal to worship the gods of the City and consequent contempt for the imperial religion were reported to the Governor as shameless impiety. Probus sent soldiers to seize her in the house that served as a monastery. Sophia wept at losing her disciple but rejoiced at offering Christ a bride adorned in the robe of varied colours, fringed with the *wrought gold* of the virtues (Ps. 44:14). Conscious of having already died to the world by renunciation and ascesis, Anastasia was not afraid to confess Christ boldly before the Governor. Not only did threats of torture and death avail nothing to shake her faith, they filled her, rather, with divine joy as the means whereby she would be completely united with Christ God. In his fury at finding himself worsted by a mere girl before the contest had begun, the tyrant loosed upon her the blind ferocity of his tormentors. They struck her in as many ways as they could devise, broke her on the wheel, tore off her breasts and finally cut out her tongue that ceased not to give thanks to God in all her torments. This is how Saint Anastasia won the victory in the contest of martyrdom. Sophia was told by an Angel to gather up her holy relics, of which the most part are now venerated at the Monastery of Grigoriou on Mount Athos.

+She is not to be confused with St Anastasia Pharmacolytria, who was martyred under Diocletian and is commemorated on 22 Dec. But she may be the same person as the St Anastasia commemorated on 12 Oct,

martyred at the same time and in identical circumstances. ***Source: The Synaxarion: The Lives of the Saints of the Orthodox Church. Volume One, Introduction, September, October. Holy Convent of The Annunciation of Our Lady, Ormylia (Chalkidike), 1998.***

Our Holy Father Abramius (366) and his niece Mary (371) of Mesopotamia

Abramius was a Christian of noble birth who, early in life, left all (including a young bride) to live as a solitary monk. This he did for fifty years. When Abramius' brother died, leaving his seven-year-old daughter Mary orphaned and alone, The Saint took her under his care, giving her a monastic cell near his own. Though Mary devoted herself joyfully to the monastic life, when she was about twenty she fell into sin with a corrupt monk who visited the hermitage. Far worse, she then fell into despair, thinking that she had cast away her salvation, and fled the hermitage to become a harlot in a nearby town. Abramius, unaware of what had happened or where she had gone, prayed constantly for her safety and to be shown where she had fled.

One day a traveler told Abramius what had become of his niece. Immediately he rose up, dressed himself as a soldier and went to the brothel where Mary worked, "for the salvation of a soul meant more to him than hermitage, Habit, ascesis or prayer itself" (Synaxarion). Still disguised, he ordered a meal, his first wine and meat for fifty years, then went with Mary to her room. Only then did he reveal himself, and with tears, not accusing her at all, pleaded with her to leave that place and return with him. "Let us go, my child; let us return to our hermitage. Let your fault be mine. I will answer for it before Christ on the day of judgment." She returned with him and, with repentance, prayed so ardently that she was soon granted not only assurance of forgiveness but the power to work miracles. St Abramius reposed in peace in great old age; Mary followed him into eternal joy five years later.

Venerable Martyr Timothy of Esphigmenou

Holy Martyr Melitena

Venerable Nestor the Unlettered of the Kiev Caves

Day 29-Oct-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Jairus and the Bleeding Woman
Ephesians 2:4-22; Luke 8:41-56
4 But God who is rich in mercy, on account of his great love by which he loved us,
5even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.
By grace you have been saved! 6 God raised us up with him, and granted us to sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the ages to come, he might show the overflowing treasure of his grace in kindness toward us, in Christ Jesus.
8 Yes, by grace you have been saved through faith, not by yourselves.
It is the gift of God, 9 not of works, so that no one would boast.
10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in advance for us to walk in them.
11 Therefore, remember that you, the Gentiles in the flesh who are called 'uncircumcision' by what is called 'circumcision' (in the flesh, made by hands); 12 remember, I say, that you used to be separated from Christ.
You were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world.
13 But now, in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ.
14 He is our peace, he who made both [groups to be] one and tore down the wall of separation.
15 He abolished in his flesh the enmity which is the law of commandments with its decrees, so that he might create in himself one new humanity instead of two, making peace.
16 He reconciled both [groups] to God in one body, through the cross, by which he destroyed that enmity.
17 He came and preached peace to you who were far off and also to those who were near.
18 Through him, we both have access to the Father in one Spirit.
19 And so, you are no longer strangers and foreigners! Instead, you are fellow-citizens with the saints, and members of God's household, 20 being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.
Christ Jesus himself is the chief cornerstone; 21in whom the whole building, fitted together, grows into a holy sanctuary in the Lord.
22 In Christ, you too are built up into a dwelling-place of God in [the] Spirit.

Gospel Reading: 7th Sun. of Luke: Jairus and the Bleeding Woman

41 And behold, a man named
Jairus came, and he was a ruler
of the synagogue.
He fell down at Jesus' feet and
begged him to come to his house
42 because he had an only
daughter, about twelve years old,
who was dying.
But as Jesus went, the crowd
pressed against him.
43 There was a woman who had
a flow of blood for twelve years
and who had spent all she had on
physicians,a but she could not be
healed by any.
44 She came behind him and
touched the fringe of his cloak.
Immediately, the flow of her blood stopped.
45 Jesus said, 'Who touched me?' As everyone was denying it, Peter and those with him said, 'Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you, and you ask, 'Who touched me?" 46 But Jesus said, 'Someone has touched me, for I perceived that power has gone out from me.
47 When the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came forth trembling. Falling down before Jesus, in the presence of all the people, she confessed to him why she had touched him, and how she had immediately been healed.
48 He said to her, 'Daughter, be of good cheer! Your faith has made you well. Go in peace.
49 While Jesus was still speaking, someone came from the ruler of the synagogue's house, saying to him, 'Your daughter is dead.
Do not trouble the Teacher.
50 But when Jesus heard it, he answered, 'Do not be afraid! Only believe, and she will be healed.
51 When Jesus arrived at the house, he did not allow anyone to enter in, except Peter, John, James, as well as the father of the child and her mother.
52 All were weeping and mourning the girl, but Jesus said, 'Do not weep! She is not dead, but sleeping.
53 But they mocked him, knowing that she was dead.
54 Jesus put them all outside, and taking the girl by the hand, he called, 'Child, arise!' 55 Her spirite returned, and she immediately got up.

He ordered that something to eat should be given to her.
56 Her parents were amazed, but he commanded them to tell no one what had been done.

SERMON ON THE EPISTLE READING
When we feel fit and healthy, and things generally are going well in our lives - family, finances and job - it is very easy for a sense of innate strength and power to start growing in us.
Pride begins to get the better of us and delude us.
But all it needs is something like an accident, an illness, a financial failure, a job loss, or a relationship fracture, to show us the reality of how frail we actually are.
We can fall into the same trap through our spiritual experience, of course nothing even remotely approaching that of which St Paul speaks in the reading, but we can nonetheless find ourselves on the path of self-exaltation, thinking that we are so strong and established in our faith, and that we have by our worth acquired spiritual knowledge and understanding which are so superior to that of others.
The nature of St Paul's 'thorn in the flesh' we are not told, but through it we are taught a profound spiritual principle, namely that it is in our weakness that God's strength is made perfect.
We should welcome anything, therefore, which brings home to us the reality of our weakness.
Infirmities reveal frailty, and seeing our frailty is a good antidote against pride.
'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (Jam. 4, 6). The reality is that we depend on God for every single breath which we take.
So if we dare boast about anything, let us join the Holy Apostle and boast about our infirmities, that the power of Christ may also rest upon us.
St Paul goes on to put infirmities alongside reproaches, needs, persecutions and distresses for Christ's sake.
So as we seek to take up our cross and follow our Lord Jesus Christ day by day, whatever comes our way, whatever trials and troubles, disturbances and difficulties, these will actually help us on the pathway of salvation, if we respond to them as did St Paul.
He even went so far as to say he took pleasure in them, 'for when I am weak, then I am strong.' Again and again we see this profound spiritual principle of God's strength made perfect in weakness in the lives of the Saints.
Let us think of the blind and paralysed St Matrona of Moscow sitting on her bed, to whom the faithful came in droves for healing and consolation, despite the best efforts of the Soviet authorities to arrest her.
Let us think of St Nectarios of Egina, the Wonderworker, who was calumniated in his lifetime, and suffered in great pain before his repose, but whose miracles never cease to multiply, and whose shrine continues to draw multitudes of pilgrims.
Let us think of St Seraphim of Sarov who was battered by robbers in his forest cell, the effects of which he suffered from for the rest of his life, who became a spiritual

father and true ‘apostle’ to the Russian people.
If we think that we are strong in ourselves, we deceive ourselves, and cut ourselves off from the strength of God.
On the contrary, if we accept that we are weak and frail, as indeed we are, humbling ourselves, God’s strength will be made perfect in us.
'You gorgeously array your walls, but do not clothe your fellow human being; you adorn horses, but turn away from the shameful plight of your brother or sister; you allow grain to rot in your barns, but do not feed those who are starving; you hide gold in the earth, but ignore the oppressed!' (St Basil the Great, To the Rich)

Day 30-Oct-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Martyrs Zenobius and his sister Zenobia (~290)

These two holy ones were brother and sister, living the city of Aegea in Cilicia. When their parents died, they gave all their possessions to the poor. Zenobius, a physician, gave his healing services for free to all who came to him, often relying more upon the holy Name of Jesus than upon medicines. In time, he became Bishop of Aegea. During the persecutions under the Emperor Diocletian, Zenobius was arrested and brought before the governor Lysias, who demanded that he deny Christ and worship the idols. When Zenobius refused, he was subjected to torture. Zenobia, hearing of this, rushed to be with him and openly rebuked the governor. The two were then tortured together and finally beheaded, faithful to their Lord to the end.

Holy Apostle Cleopas

He is numbered among the Seventy. On the day of the Resurrection, Cleopas and St Luke were walking on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus when the Risen Christ appeared to them, as recounted in the twenty-fourth chapter of St Luke's Gospel.

The Gospel account does not name St Cleopas' companion, but the holy tradition of the Church tells us that it was St Luke himself, and thus that the story is a first-hand account.

St Joseph I, Patriarch of Constantinople (1283)

Once a married priest, he entered monastic life when his wife died, and became the spiritual father of the Emperor Michael VIII Paleologus, during whose reign he was elevated to the Patriarchate. Despite this patronage, St Joseph's integrity was inviolable: At his first Divine Liturgy as Patriarch, he required the Emperor publicly to confess and repent of several sins before admitting him to Communion. He fiercely opposed the Emperor's expedient policy of union with Rome, and was therefore deposed, retiring once more to monastic life. In old age, he was restored to the Patriarchal throne upon the death of Emperor Michael, but died a few months later.

Holy Martyr Hermengild, Prince of the Visigoths (486)

He was the son and appointed heir of Leuvgild, King of the Visigoths, who had embraced the Christianity of the Arian heretics. But through the teaching of Bishop Leander of Seville (February 27), Hermengild was converted to the fullness of the Orthodox faith, for which his father the King had him thrown in prison. On the day of Pascha 486, the King sent one of his priests to give his son communion. But Hermengild refused, proclaiming that to commune with

heretics is to assent to their belief and to sink into their error; going further, he told the priest that the heretics' communion was nothing but bread and wine, for the Body and Blood of Christ are found only in the Offering made by the Church. The enraged King sent soldiers, who at his orders put his own son to death. Later, the King repented of this inhuman deed and asked Bishop Leander to instruct his youngest son Recared in the Orthodox faith. Thus the Visigoth people was brought into the Faith.

Milutin and Dragutin, Kings of Serbia

Holy Martyr Eutropia

Day 30-Oct-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Colossians 2:13-20; Luke 9:18-22
13 You were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, but he made you alive with him by forgiving us all our trespasses and by 14 wiping out the handwriting of ordinances which was against us.
He removed it out of the way, nailing it to the cross, 15 having exposed the principalities and powers, making a public display of them, and triumphing over them.
Useless or dangerous teachings 16 Therefore, let no one judge you in matters of eating, drinking, or regarding a feast day, a new moon {observance} or a Sabbath day.
17 These are a shadow of the things to come, but the body belongs to Christ.
18 Let no one rob you of your prize by false humility and a religion of angels, dwelling on things which such a one has note seen, vainly puffed up by a carnal mind.
19 Such a person is not holding firmly to the head, from whom the whole body, being supported and knit together through the joints and ligaments, grows with the growth given by God.
20 But if you died with Christ as regards these basic principles of the world, why do you subject yourselves to [these] commandments, as though you were still living in the world?

Gospel reading:
18 Once, as Jesus was praying alone and the disciples were with him, he asked them, 'Who do the multitudes say that I am?' 19 They answered, "John the Baptizer,' but others say, 'Elias (Elijah),' and others, that one of the old prophets is risen again.
20 Jesus said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered, 'The Christ of God!' 21 But he warned them and commanded them to tell this to no one, 22 saying, 'The Son of Man must suffer many things, be rejected by the presbyters, the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up.

Day 31-Oct-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Holy Apostles Stachys, Apelles, Amplias, Urban, Narcissus and Aristobolus.

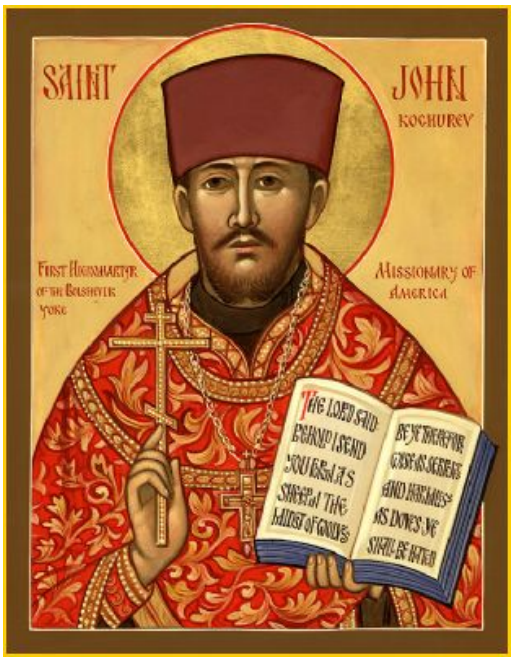
They are numbered among the Seventy. All six are mentioned by St Paul in the sixteenth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans. Stachys was appointed Bishop of Byzantium by the Apostle Andrew, and reposed in peace in AD 54. Apelles became Bishop of Heraclea in Asia Minor. Amplias and Urban were made Bishops in Macedonia by St Andrew; both died as Martyrs. Narcissus became Bishop of Athens and died a Martyr. Aristobulus became Bishop of Britain, where he reposed in peace.

New Martyr Nicholas of Chios (1754)

Raised in piety, he worked as a stone-mason until an accident deprived him of his reason and of the power of speech. The local Turkish rulers took advantage of his condition to declare him a Muslim. For years thereafter he was employed as a shepherd until he met a monk named Cyril, who prayed fervently that he be restored to his senses. He was miraculously restored, and almost immediately was filled with the desire to repent and to live only for Christ, devoting himself to prayer, fasting and vigil. Some time later he was falsely suspected of a crime by the (Christian) people of his village, and brought before the Turkish authorities. When he was questioned, he declared 'I was born a Christian, I was brought up as a Christian, I have never denied Christ for Islam, and I never will deny Him, but will die a Christian.' For this he was brutally tortured. Many local Christians, including the village priest, feared for their own safety and urged him to deny Christ, but Nicholas only rebuked them and stood firm. After many days of torture he was finally slain by the sword. The Synaxarion tells how a thick darkness fell on the whole island of Chios. When the dismayed Turks burned the Martyr's body to be rid of this miracle, they were further dismayed when a heavenly scent rose from the flames, revealing the Saint's entry into eternal glory.

Holy Hieromartyr John Kochurov, First Hieromartyr of the Russian Revolution (1917)

He was born in Russia in 1871, and as a young priest was sent to America as a missionary. There he worked zealously (he was instrumental in the building of the Orthodox cathedral in Chicago) until he was called back to Russia just before the October Revolution in 1917. Only six days after the Bolsheviks seized power, he was beaten to death in the street by a gang of Bolshevik sailors in Tsarskoye Selo near St Petersburg. Thus he became the first of countless Priest-Martyrs of Russia's atheist yoke.



Holy Martyr Epimachus
Venerable Spyridon and Nicodemus of the Kiev Caves
Youth, Confessor of Antioch

Day 31-Oct-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Colossians 2:20-3:3; Luke 9:23-27

20 But if you died with Christ as regards these basic principles of the world, why do
you subject yourselves to [these] commandments, as though you were still living in
the world? 21'Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!'
22 These things are all destined to perish with use! These are merely human
commands and teachings! 23 Indeed, these things have an appearance of wisdom
in selfimposed religion, humility, severe treatment of the body; but they have no
value against the indulgence of the flesh.
3 Raised with Christ- Death to what is earthly- The new self If you were raised
together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the
right hand of God!
2 Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are on the
earth.
3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Gospel Reading:

23 Jesus said to all, 'Anyone who desires to come after me must deny himself,
take up his cross daily, and follow me.
24 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever will lose his life for
my sake will save it.
25 Indeed what profit is there if someone gains the whole world but loses or
surrenders his own self? 26 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of
Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory, and in the glory of the
Father and of the holy angels.
27 But I tell you the truth: There are some who stand here who will in no way taste
of death, until they see the Kingdom of God.

Day 01-Nov-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy and Wonderworking Unmercenaries Cosmas and Damian of Asia (3rd c.)

Three pairs of named Cosmas and Damian are commemorated (today, on October 17, and on July 1); The two commemorated today lived near Ephesus in Asia. They were of noble birth and well-educated in all the branches of higher learning; but they turned away from worldly knowledge to practice medicine without charge for anyone who sought their help, caring for the rich as well as poor, and even for animals. They used none of the secular tools of medicine, but relied only on the Name of Christ, by which they were enabled to perform countless healings. Both reposed in peace.

Holy New Martyr Helen of Sinope (18th c.)

She was a maiden of fifteen who lived with her parents in the Christian enclave of Sinope in Pontus during the 1700s. One day, as she went to the marketplace, she passed by the house of the local Pasha (governor), who, seeing her beauty, was seized by lust for her. He ordered his servants to bring her to him, and made two attempts to defile her; each time, however, he was prevented by a mysterious power that kept him from her like an invisible wall. Determined to have his way for her, he kept her prisoner in his house; but she was able to slip away and run home to her parents' house.

Enraged that his prey had escaped, the Pasha called together the leaders of the Christian community and promised that, unless Helen were handed over to him, all the Christians in the town would be massacred. Grief-stricken and fearful, the leaders persuaded Helen's father to return the girl to the palace. The vile Pasha made several more attempts to rape the Saint, but once again he was restrained as if by an invisible wall as she recited the Six Psalms and all the prayers that she knew by heart. Realizing that he was powerless against her, the Pasha had her thrown in the common jail, then ordered that she be tortured to death. The executioners subjected the maiden to several cruel torments before killing her by driving two nails into her skull and beheading her. They then put her body in a sack and threw it in the Black

Sea.

Some Greek sailors followed a heavenly light to the place where the sack had sunk, and divers retrieved the Saint's relics, which immediately revealed themselves as a source of healing for many. Her body was taken to Russia; her head was placed in the church in Sinope, where it continued to work miracles, especially for those who suffered from headaches. When the Greeks were driven from Sinope in 1924, refugees took the head with them. It is venerated today in a church near Thessalonika.

Venerable Martyr James with his disciples James and Dionysius

Venerable David of Euboea

Day 01-Nov-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Colossians 3:17-4:1; Luke 9:44-50
17 Whatever you do, in word or in deed, do it all in the Name of the Lord Jesus,
giving thanks through him to God the Father.
18 Wives, be in subjection to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.
19 Husbands, love your wives, and do not be bitter against them.
20 Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is pleasing to the Lord.
21 Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not be discouraged.
22 Servants,a obey in all things to those who are your masters according to the
flesh, not just when they are looking (to please human beings), but in singleness of
heart, fearing God.
23 Whatever you do, work with your heart, as for the Lord, and not for men.
24 Know that you will receive the reward of your inheritance from the Lord, for you
serve the Lord Christ.
25 But whoever does wrong will receive in return according to the wrong that he
has done, and there is no partiality.
4 Masters, give to your servants what is fair and right, knowing that you also have
a Master in heaven.

Gospel Reading:
44 'Let these words sink into your ears, for the Son of Man will be delivered up into
the hands of men.
45 But they did not understand this saying; it was concealed from them so that
they should not understand its meaning, and they were afraid to ask him about this
saying.
46 A dispute sprang up among them about which [one] of them was the greatest.
47 Jesus, perceiving the reasoning of their hearts, took a little child and set him by
his side.
48 He then said to them, 'Whoever receives this little child in my Name receives
me.
Whoever receives me receives him who sent me.
For whoever is the least among you all, this one will be great.
The exorcist who used the Name of Jesus
49 John said, 'Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your Name, and we

tried to stop him because he does not follow with us.
50 Jesus said to him, 'Do not forbid him, for whoever is not against us is for us.

Day 02-Nov-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Holy Martyrs Acindynus, Pegasius, Aphthonius, Elpidophorus and Anempodistus of Persia (376)

Acindynus, Pegasius and Anempodistus were courtiers to King Shapur II of Persia. When the king began a fierce persecution of Christians, the three withdrew from court to a private house and, fearless of their own safety, openly exhorted their fellow-Christians to stand firm in their faith. For this they were arrested and brought before their former lord, who subjected them to many cruel tortures, from which they emerged miraculously unscathed. Seeing this, one of the king's soldiers, named Aphthonius, embraced the Faith and was immediately beheaded. The former courtiers were then put to further tortures, but their only effect was to convince Elpidophorus, a distinguished nobleman, and seven thousand other Persians to faith in Christ. All were beheaded, but not before receiving holy Baptism. The trials of the three continued, but once again they were preserved, and even the king's mother was led to the true faith. Finally they were killed (the account does not say how), receiving the crown of martyrdom along with the king's mother and twenty-eight others.

Venerable Marcian of Cyrus

Holy Martyrs Cyriaca, Domnina and Domna

Day 02-Nov-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Colossians 4:2-9; Luke 9:49-56

2 Persevere in prayer, even in vigils of thanksgiving.
3 Pray for us as well, so that God may open to us a door for the word, [an opportunity] to speak the mystery of Christ for which I am in chains.
4 Pray also that I may reveal it as clearly as I should.
5 Live wisely before those who are 'outside,' and make the most of your time.
6 Let your speech always be pleasant, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to properly answer those who have questions.
Paul's fellow-workers 7 All my affairs will be made known to you by Tychicus, the beloved brother, a faithful servant and fellow-slave in the Lord.
8 I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that he may know your circumstances and comfort your hearts, 9 together with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you.
They will tell you everything that is happening here.

Gospel Reading:

49 John said, 'Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your Name, and we tried to stop him because he does not follow with us.
50 Jesus said to him, 'Do not forbid him, for whoever is not against us is for us.
The journey to Jerusalem – Would-be disciples 51 It came to pass, when the days were near for him to be taken up, that he resolutely set his faced to go to Jerusalem, 52 and he sent messengers ahead of him.
They went and entered into a village of the Samaritans in order to make preparation for him.
53 But the people did not receive him because he was heading for Jerusalem.
54 When his disciples James and John saw this, they said, 'Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and destroy them, just as Elias (Elijah) did?' 55 But Jesus turned around and rebuked them, 'You do not know of what kind of spirit you are.
56 For the Son of Man did not come to destroy people's lives but to save them.
They went on to another village.

Day 03-Nov-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Martyrs Acepsimas the bishop, Joseph the priest and Aithalas the deacon (378-379)

> King Shapur II of Persia conducted a fierce persecution of Christians in his realm for thirty-seven years. In the final years of this persecution he gave his magi authority to torture and kill any Christians who would not renounce their faith. Acepsimas, the aged and holy Bishop of Paka, was arrested along with Joseph the priest and Aithalas the deacon. All not only refused to deny Christ, but boldly preached Him before the magi and the king. The enraged king had them viciously tortured, then, as a final indignity, made prisoners of all the local Christians and forced them to stone their own shepherds to death. With their martyrdom the great persecution in Persia came to an end.

Holy Virgin Martyr Winefride of Treffynnon (Holywell), Wales (7th c.)

> "Saint Winefride (in Welsh, Gwenfrewi) was a maiden of noble birth who lived in North wales in the seventh century. The niece and spiritual daughter of Saint Beuno (21 April), she entered the Monastery of Gwytherin after his death, where she lived under the spiritual direction of Saint Eleril. The son of a neighbouring chieftan, Caradoc by name, seized by an unchaste passion, pursued her and struck off her head with a sword. The spot where her head fell became known as Treffynnon or Holywell, because of the appearing of a healing spring for those who would take its waters with faith. Holywell remains a great place of pilgrimage in Britain to this day." (Synaxarion)

Translation of the Relics of Saint George, from Nicomedia

Venerable Elias the Egyptian

Saint Theodore the Confessor, Bishop of Ancyra

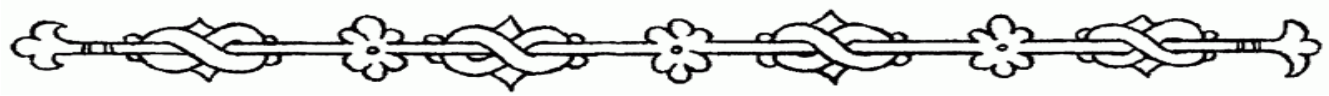
New Martyr George of Neapolis

Day 03-Nov-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Colossians 4:10-18; Luke 10:1-15
10 Aristarchus, my fellow-prisoner, greets you, and Mark, the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you received instructions, 'if he comes to you, receive him'), 11 and also Jesus who is called Justus.
These are my only fellow-workers for the Kingdom of God who are of the circumcision, and they have been my consolation.
12 Epaphras (who is one of you), a servant of Christ, salutes you.
He is always wrestling for you in his prayers, so that you may stand perfect and fulfill in all things the will of God.
13 I can testify about him: that he has devotion to you, and also to those in Laodicea and Hierapolis.
14 Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas greet you.
15 Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea; and also Nymphas, along with the Church which meets in her house.
16 When this letter has been read among you, please have it also read in the Church of the Laodiceans; and also read the letter from Laodicea.
17 Tell Archippus this, 'Be mindful of the ministry which you have received in the Lord, and fulfill it.
18 Here is my greeting: Paul, with my own hand! Remember my chains.
Grace be with you! Amen.
Gospel reading:

After these things, the Lord also appointed seventy others and sent them two by two ahead of him into every city and place where he was about to go.
2 Jesus said to them, 'The harvest is indeed plentiful, but the laborers are few.
Pray therefore to the Lord of the harvest, that he may send out laborers into his harvest.
3Go on your ways, [but] be aware that I am sending you out as lambs among wolves.
4 Do not carry a purse, a wallet, or sandals.
Do not greet anyone on the way.
5Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house.
6 If a follower of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you.
7 Remain in that house, eating and drinking what they will give [you], for the laborer deserves his wages.

Do not go from house to house.
8 Whatever town you enter and if the people welcome you, eat whatever is set
before you.
9 Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The Kingdom of God has come near
to you!' 10 But if you enter into any town and people there do not welcome you, go
out into its streets and say, 11 'Even the dust from your city that clings to us, we
wipe off against you.
Nevertheless, know this, that the Kingdom of God has come near to you!' 12 I tell
you, it will be more tolerable in that day for Sodom than for such a city.
Woe to Chorazin and Bethsaida 13 Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida!
For if the deeds of power which were done in you had been done in Tyre and
Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes.
14 But in the judgment, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you.
15 You, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be brought down
to hades!



Day 04-Nov-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Our Holy Father Joannicius the Great, hermit on Mt Olympus (846)

He was born in Bithynia of peasant stock. He worked as a swineherd, then became an officer in the Imperial army, where he served with such distinction in the war against the Bulgars that the Emperor Constantine VI wanted to take him into his personal service. "But the sight of massacres and horrors of war had brought home to him the vanity of this life. He asked leave of the Emperor to retire from the service, in order to wage unseen warfare in the ranks of the angelic army" (Synaxarion). In the coming years he traveled widely, sometimes living as a hermit, sometimes living in monasteries, more than once founding a monastic community. Wherever he went he lived in stillness, solitude and strict asceticism. He was famed for his spiritual counsel, his prophecies, his many miracles of healing ailments bodily and spiritual, and for his friendship with animals. Once a monk who doubted the Saint's miracles was eating at table with him when a large bear burst in upon them. Joannicius called the bear and it came and lay at his feet; he then told it to lie at the feet of his frightened guest and said "At their creation, the animals looked with veneration on man, who is made in the image of God, and he had no fear of them. We are afraid of them now because we have transgressed God's commandments. If we love the Lord Jesus and keep his commandments, no animal will be able to do us any harm." The monk departed greatly edified.

In the last years of Joannicius' life, when he was about ninety years old, the Emperor Theophilus sought his counsel on the veneration of icons. The Saint's answer was pointed: "Whoever refuses due honor to the images of Christ, of the Mother of God and of the Saints, will not be received into the Kingdom of Heaven, even if he has lived an otherwise blameless life."

Once Joannicius traveled to Constantinople to aid the Patriarch in some matters concerning the order of the Church. When he returned to his hermitage, he found that some jealous monks had set it on fire. Knowing who they were, he nevertheless addressed them kindly and invited them to share with him some food that he had managed to salvage from the fire. He did not attempt to rebuild his hermitage, but, taking the fire as a sign of his impending departure from this life, he traveled to the monastery of Antidion, where he had first entered into the monastic life and there, having predicted the day of his death, he reposed in peace. At the moment of his death, the monks of Mt Olympus saw a pillar of fire ascending from the earth to the sky.

The Saint's relics have been the source of many miracles. His skull is kept

and venerated at the Monastery of the Pantocrator on Mt Athos. The widely-used prayer "My hope is the Father; my refuge is the Son; my shelter is the Holy Spirit; O Holy Trinity, glory be to Thee!" is attributed to St Joannicius.

Holy Hieromartyrs Nicander, Bishop of Myra, and Hermas the Presbyter
Holy Martyr Porphyrios the Mime
Venerable John Akatzios

Day 04-Nov-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: 2 Corinthians 5:1-10; Luke 7:1-10

5 After death We know that if our earthly tent a is dissolved, we have a building
from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.
2It is certain that we groan in this [tent], longing to be clothed with our heavenly
dwelling; 3so that being clothed we will not be found naked.
4 We who are in this tent are truly groaning as we are burdened;b but it is not that
we desire to be unclothed; rather, we desire to be clothed, so that what is mortal
may be swallowed up by life.
5Now, the one who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also gave us
the pledged of the Spirit.
6 Therefore, we are always confident and know that while we are at home in the
body, we are absent from the Lord; 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight.
8 I dare say that we are courageous and that we would rather be absent from the
body and at home with the Lord.
9 And so, we make this our aim: that whether at home or absent, we would be
well-pleasing to him.
10 For we must all be revealed before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each
one may receive according to what was done in the body; good or evil.

Gospel Reading:

When Jesus had finished speaking all that he wanted the people to hear, he
entered into Capernaum.
2There was the servant of a certain centurion, a man highly valued by his master,
who was sick and at the point of death.
3 When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him presbyters of the Jews to
ask him to come and save his servant.
4 When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, saying, 'This man
deserves to have you do this 5 because he loves our nation and [even] built our
synagogue for us.
6 Jesus went along with them, but as he was approaching the house, the centurion
sent word to him (by some friends to say to him), 'Lord, do not trouble yourself, for
I am not worthy for you to come under my roof.
7 Therefore, I did not even think myself worthy to come to you.
But [only] say the word and my servant will be healed.

8 For I am also a man placed under authority, and I have soldiers under my command.
a I tell this one, 'Go!' and he goes; and to another, 'Come!' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it.
9 When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him.
Turning around, he said to the multitude who followed him, 'I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel!' 10 And the messengers, returning to the house, found that the servant who had been sick was [now] well.

Day 05-Nov-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Galaktion and his wife Episteme, the Martyrs of Emesa

Both Galaktion and Episteme were born in the city of Emesa, in Phoenicia. Galaktion's mother was barren until she was baptized. After her baptism, she converted her husband [Cleitophon] to the true Faith, baptized her son Galaktion, and raised him in the Christian Faith. When Galaktion was old enough to marry, his good mother, Leucippa, entered into rest, and his father betrothed him to a pagan-born maiden named Episteme. By no means did Galaktion want to enter into marriage, and convinced Episteme to be baptized, then to be tonsured a nun at the same time that he became a monk. Both of them withdrew to Mount Publion – Galaktion to a monastery and Episteme to a convent. They proved to be shining lights in their monasteries. They were first in labor, first in prayer, first in humility and obedience, and first in love. They neither left their monasteries nor did they see one another until just before their death. A fierce persecution began and both of them were brought before the tribunal. When the pagans mercilessly whipped Galaktion, Episteme wept. Then they whipped her. After that, they cut off their hands, their feet and then their heads. Their friend Eutolius took their bodies and honorably buried them. Eutolius had been a slave of Episteme's parents, and then a monk with Galaktion. He also wrote the life of these wonderful martyrs of Christ who suffered and received their wreaths in heaven in the year 253.

Source: St. Nikolai Velimirovic, The Prologue of Ohrid – Volume Two.

Apolytikion

Thy Martyrs, O Lord, in their courageous contest for Thee received as the prize the crowns of incorruption and life from Thee, our immortal God. For since they possessed Thy strength, they cast down the tyrants and wholly destroyed the demons' strengthless presumption. O Christ God, by their prayers, save our souls, since Thou art merciful.

Kontakion

The Martyrs of Christ, received you in their companies, who through mighty trials contested most resplendently; O renowned Galaktion and thy hallowed spouse and co-sufferer, Episteme, ye both entreat the one God and Lord in behalf of us all.

Holy Martyrs Galaction and Episteme (~250)

A pagan couple, Cleitophon and Leucippe, who lived in Emesa in the reign of the Emperor Decius, were grieved that they were unable to have children. One day a monk named Onuphrius came to their door seeking alms to give to the poor, and seeing Leucippe's downcast face, asked her what was wrong. When she replied that she was barren, Onuphrius told her that this was by God's providence, to prevent their child from being given over to idolatry, and that if they accepted Christ she would bear a child. Leucippe was baptized into the Faith and bore a son not long after, which in turn brought her husband to faith in Christ. The son was named Galaction in baptism.

Years later, Galaction's father, now widowed, decided that Galaction should marry a pagan maiden named Episteme. Galaction married out of obedience, but would not approach Episteme's bed since she was a pagan. In time, he convinced her of the truth of the Faith and baptised her himself. Not long after she was told in a dream of the glory that awaits those who consecrate themselves wholly to God. When she told her husband of the dream, they both resolved to remain in virginity, settling in separate monastic communities near to one another.

In one of the Emperor's persecutions of Christians, Galaction was seized by imperial soldiers and taken away to be killed. Episteme, told in a vision of his arrest, asked the blessing of her abbess to join him in martyrdom. Receiving it, she hurried to Galaction's place of imprisonment, boldly announced her faith in Christ, and after many tortures and humiliations husband and wife were beheaded together.

Holy Apostles Patrobas, Hermas, Linus, Gaius and Philologus

They are numbered among the Seventy Disciples of the Lord.

Saint Hermas and Saint Patrobolus are both mentioned by St Paul in Romans 16:4. Saint Hermas became Bishop of Philippi. Some believe him to be the author of The Shepherd, which was so cherished by the early Church that is included in some early versions of the New Testament. Saint Patrobolus became Bishop of Pozzuoli in Italy.

Saint Linus (mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:21) was ordained by St Peter as first Bishop of Rome. He was martyred, perhaps in AD 76.

Saint Gaius (mentioned in Romans 16:23, where we learn that St Paul stayed with him in Corinth), succeeded St Timothy as Bishop of Ephesus.

Saint Philologus (mentioned in Romans 16:15), was made Bishop of Sinope in Pontus by the Apostle Andrew.

Our Holy Father Gregory the Confessor, Patriarch of Alexandria (early 9th c.)

This much-loved shepherd of the Church at Alexandria was unanimously elected to the Patriarchate by the Bishops and people of that city. Though meek and humble, he was a fierce defender of holy Orthodoxy, which was then under attack by the Emperor Leo the Armenian (813-820). For his fearless defense of the holy Icons, Gregory was arrested at the Emperor's orders and brought in chains to Constantinople. Brought before Leo, the holy Patriarch told him clearly that he was a heretic and an enemy of the Church. The enraged Emperor had Gregory scourged, then sent into exile, where he reposed three years later.

Saint Jonah, Archbishop of Novgorod

Day 05-Nov-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus
Galatians 6:11-18; Luke 16:19-31
11 See with what large letters I write to you with my own hand! 12 It is those who
desire to make a good showing in the flesh who are trying to compel you to be
circumcised; and it only so that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.
13 Even those who receive circumcision do not themselves keep the law, but they
desire to have you circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh.
14 As for me, I shall find glory in nothing, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus
Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.
15 In Christ Jesus, circumcision and uncircumcision mean nothing; only a new
creation {is significant}.
16 To those who live by this rule, may there be peace and mercy upon them, and
on the Israel of God.
17 From now on, let no one cause me any trouble, for I bear the marks of the Lord
Jesus branded on my body.
18 May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren.
Amen.

Gospel Reading: 5th Sunday of Luke: The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus

19 Now, there was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen,
feasting in luxury every day.
20 A certain beggar named Lazarus was laid at his gate, full of sores, 21 who
desired to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table.
Yes, even dogs came and licked his sores.
22 It happened that the beggar died and that he was carried away by the angels to
Abraham's bosom.
The rich man also died, and was buried.
23 In hades, he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far off, and
Lazarus in his bosom.
24 He cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, so
that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue! For I am in agony
in this flame!' 25 But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime, you
received your good things, and Lazarus, in the same way, bad things.
But now, he is comforted here and you are in anguish.
26 Besides all this, between us and you a great gulf is fixed, so that those who

want to pass from here to you cannot [do so], and that no one may cross over from there to us.
27 He said, 'I ask you therefore, father, that you would send Lazarus to my father's house; 28 for I have five brothers, that he might bear witness to them, so that they would not also come to this place of torment.
29 But Abraham replied to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets! Let them listen to them!' 30 But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.
31 Then Abraham said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone rises from the dead.

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING

Today's parable illustrates that how we treat our neighbour in this life has consequences for how we fare in the next.

Let us not get caught up too much in the description of Hell and its torments.

We are hearing a parable, not a literal description.

Our Lord often uses simple imagery, metaphors and parallels in order to convey things which are otherwise impossible to explain or describe.

The parable tells of how a wealthy man who ignores the plight of the poor and suffering finds himself in anguish beyond the grave, while the poor, suffering man finds comfort in God.

Saint Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain described heaven and hell in a similar way, stating that God is fire, and whether we experience God as heaven and hell depends on our relationship with Him.

Those who approach Him with fear and love experience Him as warmth and light, but those who approach Him carelessly and without reverence experience Him as a scorching flame.

St Isaac the Syrian also believed that Hell is the pain of God's love: 'I say that those who are tormented in hell are tormented by the invasion of love.

What is there more bitter and violent than the pains of love? Those who feel they have sinned against love bear in themselves a damnation much heavier than the most dreaded punishments.

The suffering with which sinning against love afflicts the heart is more keenly felt than any other torment.

It is absurd to assume that the sinners in hell are deprived of God's love.

Love is offered impartially.
But by its very power it acts in two ways.
It torments sinners, as happens here on earth when we are tormented by the presence of a friend to whom we have been unfaithful.
And it gives joy to those who have been faithful.
That is what the torment of hell is in my opinion: remorse".
The sin of the rich man was not anything he did in life, but something he did not do: he did not show compassion to the poor man on the street, he showed no love.
In another parable about heaven and hell, our Lord again stresses that we will be judged by love: 'I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was a prisoner and you came to me' (Matt. 25:35). There is another important point in the parable.
Abraham says to the rich man in hell, 'a great gulf has been fixed between us so that those here cannot pass over there, and those there cannot pass here".
After death, we cannot repent of what we have done.
The time for repentance is now.
Alas, some Greek Orthodox Christians are taught that if our relatives pray for us in memorial services after we have gone, we will be saved regardless of their actions.
This is a terrible misunderstanding of the Orthodox Tradition of praying for the dead.
We pray for the dead because we love them, and we ask God to be merciful to the departed and even to 'forgive every sin committed by them in word or deed or thought".
But the Church has, at the same time, always held that there is no repentance after death, and we will be judged for what we have done in this life.
Praying for the dead does not mean that the departed are guaranteed salvation regardless of their own actions and choices in life.
We believe God is merciful and forgiving, that He 'desires all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth".
But we know also that 'He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead".
This is why, at every Liturgy we pray for 'a good defense before the dread judgement seat of Christ"

SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM ON PRAYING FOR THE DEAD eep for those who die in their wealth and who with all their wealth prepared no consolation for their own souls, who had the power to wash away their sins and did not will to do it.
Let us weep for them, let us assist them to the extent of our ability, let us think of some assistance for them, small as it may be, yet let us somehow assist them.
But how, and in what way? By praying for them and by entreating others to pray for them, by constantly giving alms to the poor on their behalf.
Not in vain was it decreed by the apostles that in the awesome mysteries

remembrance should be made of the departed.
They knew that here there was much gain for them, much benefit.
When all the people stand with hands uplifted - a priestly assembly - and that awesome sacrificial Victim is laid out, how, when we are calling upon God, should we not succeed in their defence? But this is done for those who have departed in the faith, while even the catechumens are not reckoned as worthy of this consolation, but are deprived of every means of assistance except one.
And what is that? We may give alms to the poor on their behalf (Homilies on Philippians 3: 4-10) Let us help and commemorate them.
If Job's sons were purified by their father's sacrifice [Job 1:5], why would we doubt that our offerings for the dead bring them some consolation? Let us not hesitate to help those who have died and to offer our prayers for them.
(Homilies on First Corinthians 41:5)

Day 06-Nov-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Paul the Confessor, Archbishop of Constantinople (~350)

A native of Thessalonica, he rose from secretary to Alexander, Patriarch of Constantinople (commemorated August 30), to deacon, then succeeded St Alexander as Patriarch around 337. For his virtue and his zeal for Orthodoxy he was hated by the Arians, who were still powerful in the Empire. The Arian Emperor Constantius, learning of Paul's election, exiled him and made the Arian Eusebius Patriarch in his place. St Paul went to Rome, where he joined St Athanasius the Great in exile. Furnished with letters from Pope Julius, he was able to ascend the Patriarchal throne once again upon the death of Eusebius. But once again the Arians were able to put one of their party on the Patriarchal throne: Macedonius, who even went beyond the Arian heresy and denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Once again the legitimate, Orthodox Patriarch found himself in exile in Rome. In succeeding years St Paul stood firm for Orthodoxy while complex political and military intrigues swirled around him, with the Orthodox Constans, Emperor of the West (and Constantius' brother) supporting him while Constantius continued to oppose him. For a time Constans was able to enforce Paul's place on the Patriarchal throne, but when he died, Constantius banished St Paul to Cucusus on the Black Sea. There, while he was celebrating the Divine Liturgy in the house where he was kept prisoner, the Arians strangled him with his own omophorion. His relics were brought back to Constantinople by the Emperor Theodosius the Great.

Saint Germanus, Archbishop of Kazan (1568)

He was born in Tver to a princely family. Drawn to a life of holiness from his earliest childhood, he became a monk at the age of twenty-five, at the Monastery of St Joseph of Volokolamsk. In time he became Archimandrite of the Monastery of the Dormition at Staritsk; but after a few years he returned to Volokolamsk to live in solitude. When his teacher St Gurias (October 4), first Archbishop of Kazan, reposed, Germanus succeeded him as Archbishop, but continued to live as ascetically as when he was a hermit. He was offered the office of Metropolitan of Moscow, but refused. As a faithful shepherd of his church, he fearlessly confronted Tsar Ivan the Terrible for his many and various cruelties; for this he was killed in 1568 by the Tsar's assassins.

Note: Recently, a bizarre movement has arisen among some nationalist sectarians in Russia to canonize Ivan the Terrible. Among the many obvious reasons against such an action (which has been firmly rejected by the

Patriarch of Moscow), we could list the Tsar's murder of some of the Church's own Saints, Germanus among them.

Venerable Barlaam of Khutyn, the Miracle-worker

Day 06-Nov-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5; Luke 10:22-24
1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy: to the Church of the Thessalonians [which is] in
God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ.
Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
2 We always give thanks to God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers,
3always remembering your work of faith, your labor of love and your patience of
hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father.
4 Brethren beloved by God, we know that you are chosen 5 and that our Good
News came to you not in word only, but also in power, in the Holy Spirit, and with
full assurance.
You know how we lived among you for your sake

Gospel reading:
22 Turning to the disciples, he said, 'All things have been delivered to me by my
Father.
No one knows who the Son is, except the Father, and who the Father is, except
the Son, and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.
23 Turning to the disciples, Jesus said privately, 'Blessed are the eyes which see
the things that you see! 24 For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to
see what you see, but they did not see them; and to hear what you hear, but they
did not hear them.

Day 07-Nov-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

St Hieron and his thirty-three Companions, martyred at Melitene (290)

Hieron was a farmer from Tyana in Cappadocia, known for his great bodily strength as well as purity of soul. Hearing of his prowess, imperial soldiers came to draft him into the army. Knowing that he would be required to make sacrifice to the idols, Hieron drove them off with only a wooden stave, then hid in the wilderness. Later, however, he went to the Governor voluntarily and openly confessed his faith in Christ. For this his right hand was cut off and he was imprisoned with thirty-two other believers. As they awaited their end, Hieron strengthened the others in the Faith. All were beheaded together outside Melitene in Armenia.

Saint Willibrord, first Bishop of Utrecht and Apostle of Holland (739)

He was born in Northubria in England around 638. At the age of seven he was sent to the monastery at Ripon for education under St Wilfrid (April 24), the abbot. At the age of twenty he traveled to Ireland to live among the holy monks of that land; he spent twelve years there as the spiritual child of St Egbert (also April 24). In 690 St Egbert sent Willibrord as head of a company of twelve monks to take the Gospel to the pagan lands around Frisia. The holy missionary first went to Rome to receive the blessing of Pope Sergius, then with his fellow-monks preached the Gospel throughout Holland and Zealand. In 695 Pope Sergius consecrated Willibrord Archbishop of Utrecht, instructing him to organize the Church throughout that area. As Archbishop, Willibrord continued to labor tirelessly for the spread of the Gospel in those pagan lands; his missionary travels took him as far as Denmark. He reposed in peace in 739 at Echternach Monastery (located in present-day in Luxembourg), having served for forty-four years as a bishop and for most of his life as a monastic. His tomb soon became a place of pilgrimage.

Lazarus the Wonderworker of Galesius

Holy Martyr Alexander of Thessalonica

Holy Martyr Thessalonica with Auctus and Taurion

Holy Martyr Athenodorus

Day 07-Nov-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free
Readings of the day: 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10; Luke 11:1-10
6 You became imitators of us, and of the Lord, having received the word with the joy of the Holy Spirit, and this in spite of much affliction.
7 And so, you became an example to all those who believe in Macedonia and Achaia.
8 From you, the word of the Lord has been proclaimed, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith has been known in many other places, so that we have no need to say anything.
9 Others have given us a report about how you received us and how you turned away from idols to God, to serve a living and true God 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven.
God has raised him from the dead- Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Gospel Reading:
1 One day, when Jesus had finished praying in a certain place, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, just as John also taught his disciples.
2 Jesus said to them, 'When you pray, say: 'Our Father in heaven, May your Name be kept holy! May your Kingdom come! May your will be done on Earth, as it is in heaven.
3 Give us day by day our daily bread.
4 Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.
5 He said to them, 'Suppose [that] one of you has a friend.
You go to this friend's house at midnight and tell him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread!
6 A friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him.
7 Then, the one inside answers and says, 'Do not bother me! The door is now shut and my children are with me in bed.
I cannot get up and give you anything!
8 I tell you, although he will not get up and give food to him because they are friends, yet because of the requester's bold persistence, he will get up and give him as much as he needs.
9 I tell you, keep asking, and it will be given you.
Keep seeking, and you will find.

Keep knocking, and it will be opened to you.
10 For everyone who asks receives.
Whoever seeks finds.
To the one who knocks it will be opened.

Day 08-Nov-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Synaxis of the Chief Captains of the Heavenly Host, Michael and Gabriel, and of the other Bodiless Powers of Heaven

The angels of God were celebrated by men from earliest times but this celebration was often turned into the divinization of angels (II Kings 23:5). The heretics wove all sorts of fables concerning the angels. Some of them looked upon angels as gods; others, although they did not consider them gods, called them the creators of the whole visible world. The local Council of Laodicea (four of five years before the First Ecumenical Council) rejected the worship of angels as gods and established the proper veneration of angels in its Thirty-fifth Canon. In the fourth century, during the time of Sylvester, Pope of Rome, and Alexander, Patriarch of Alexandria, the present Feast of Archangel Michael and all the other heavenly powers was instituted for celebration in the month of November. Why precisely in November? Because November is the ninth month after March, and March is considered to be the month in which the world was created. Also, as the ninth month after March, November was chosen for the nine orders of angels who were created first. St. Dionysius the Areopagite, a disciple of the Apostle Paul (who was taken up into the third heaven), described these nine orders of angels in his book, *On the Celestial Hierarchies*, as follows: six-winged Seraphim, many-eyed Cherubim, God-bearing Thrones, Dominions, Powers, Virtues, Principalities, Archangels, and Angels. The leader of all the angelic hosts is the Archangel Michael. When Satan, Lucifer, fell away from God and drew a part of the angels with him to destruction, then Michael stood up and cried out before the faithful angels: 'Let us attend! Let us stand aright! Let us stand with fear!' and all of the faithful angelic heavenly hosts cried out: 'Holy! Holy! Holy! Lord God of Sabaoth! Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory!' Concerning the Archangel Michael, see Joshua 5:13-15 and Jude 1:9. Among the angels there reign perfect oneness of mind, oneness of soul, and love. The lower orders also show complete obedience to the higher orders, and all of them together to the holy will of God. Every nation has its guardian angel, as does every Christian. We must always remember that whatever we do, in

open or in secret, we do in the presence of our guardian angel. On the day of the Dread Judgment, the multitude of the hosts of the holy angels of heaven will gather around the throne of Christ, and the deeds, words, and thoughts of every man will be revealed before all. May God have mercy on us and save us by the prayers of the Archangel Michael and all the bodiless heavenly powers. Amen.

Source: St. Nikolai Velimirovic, The Prologue of Ohrid – Volume Two.

Apolytikion

O Commanders of the Heavenly Host, we the unworthy beseech you, that through your entreaties you will fortify us, guarding us in the shelter of the wings of your ethereal glory, even as we fervently bow before you crying: “Deliver us from all danger, as Commanders of the Powers on high!”

Kontakion

Chief Commanders of God; ministers of divine glory; guides for men and leadership of the Incorporeal; as Chief Commanders of the Incorporeal, plead for our welfare and for great mercy.

Venerable Euphrosyne the Younger

Day 08-Nov-2023 Wednesday

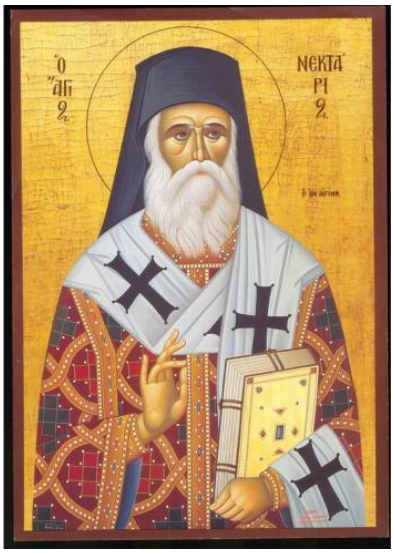
Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8; Luke 11:9-13
2 Paul's relationship with the Thessalonians You certainly know, brethren, that our visit to you was not in vain!
2 Having suffered before and having been shamefully treated in Philippi, as you know, we became bold in our God to tell you the Good News of God in a context of much conflict.
3 Certainly, our exhortation does not come from error, impurity, or deception.
4 But since we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the Good News, this is how we speak, not to please people but God who tests our hearts.
5 We never used flattering words, (as you know,) and we never put a mask over greed (as God is witness).
6 We did not seek glory from men (neither from you nor from others), even though we could have claimed authority as apostles of Christ.
7 Instead, we were gentlea among you, like a nursing mother cherishes her own children.
8 We became so devoted to you that we were pleased to share not only the Good News of God but also our very souls, because you had become very dear to us.

Gospel Reading:
9 I tell you, keep asking, and it will be given you.
Keep seeking, and you will find.
Keep knocking, and it will be opened to you.
10 For everyone who asks receives.
Whoever seeks finds.
To the one who knocks it will be opened.
11 Who among you fathers, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if a son asks for a fish, the father will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he?
12 Or if a son asks for an egg, the father will not give him a scorpion, will he? 13 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give [the] Holy Spirit to those who ask him!'

Day 09-Nov-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Our Father among the Saints Nectarius (Nektarios), bishop of Pentapolis, Wonderworker, and founder of the Monastery of the Holy Trinity on Aegina (1920).



Saint Nektarios was born in Selyvria of Thrace on October 1, 1846. After putting himself through school in Constantinople with much hard labour, he became a monk on Chios in 1876, receiving the monastic name of Lazarus; because of his virtue, a year later he was ordained deacon, receiving the new name of Nektarios. Under the patronage of Patriarch Sophronius of Alexandria, Nektarios went to Athens to study in 1882; completing his theological studies in 1885, he went to Alexandria, where Patriarch Sophronius ordained him priest on March 23, 1886 in the Cathedral of Saint Sabbas, and in August of the same year, in the Church of Saint Nicholas in Cairo, made him Archimandrite. Archimandrite Nektarios showed much zeal both for preaching the word of God, and for the beauty of God's house. He greatly beautified the Church of Saint Nicholas in Cairo, and years later, when Nektarios was in Athens, Saint Nicholas appeared to him in a dream, embracing him and telling him he was going to exalt him very high.

On January 15, 1889, in the same Church of Saint Nicholas, Nektarios was consecrated Metropolitan of the Pentapolis in eastern Libya, which was under the jurisdiction of Alexandria. Although Nektarios' swift ascent through the degrees of ecclesiastical office did not affect his modesty and childlike innocence, it aroused the envy of lesser men, who convinced the elderly Sophronius that Nektarios had it in his heart to become Patriarch. Since the people loved Nektarios, the Patriarch was troubled by the slanders. On May 3, 1890, Sophronius relieved Metropolitan Nektarios of his duties; in July of the same year, he commanded Nektarios to leave Egypt.

Without seeking to avenge or even to defend himself, the innocent Metropolitan left for Athens, where he found that accusations of immorality had arrived before him. Because his good name had been soiled, he was unable to find a position worthy of a bishop, and in February of 1891 accepted the position of provincial preacher in Euboia; then, in 1894, he was appointed

dean of the Rizarios Ecclesiastical School in Athens. Through his eloquent sermons his unwearying labours to educate fitting men for the priesthood, his generous alms deeds despite his own poverty, and the holiness, meekness, and fatherly love that were manifest in him, he became a shining light and a spiritual guide to many. At the request of certain pious women, in 1904 he began the building of his convent of the Holy Trinity on the island of Aegina while yet dean of the Rizarios School; finding later that his presence there was needed, he took up his residence on Aegina in 1908, where he spent the last years of his life, devoting himself to the direction of his convent and to very intense prayer; he was sometimes seen lifted above the ground while rapt in prayer. He became the protector of all Aegina, through his prayers delivering the island from drought, healing the sick, and casting out demons. Here also he endured wicked slanders with singular patience, forgiving his false accusers and not seeking to avenge himself. Although he had already worked wonders in life, an innumerable multitude of miracles have been wrought after his repose in 1920 through his holy relics, which for many years remained incorrupt. There is hardly a malady that has not been cured through his prayers; but Saint Nektarios is especially renowned for his healings of cancer for sufferers in all parts of the world.

Source: Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

Apolytikion

O faithful, let us honor Nektarios, divine servant of Christ, offspring of Silivria and guardian of Aegina, who in these latter years was manifested as the true friend of virtue. All manner of healing wells forth for those who in piety cry out, “Glory to Christ who glorified you; glory to Him who, through you, wrought wonders; glory to Him who, through you, works healing for all.”

Our Venerable Father John the Dwarf (John the Short) (4th c.)

He lived in the desert of Skete (Scetis) in Egypt during the fourth century, the golden age of the Desert Fathers. Nothing is known of his life in the world. He spent many years as the disciple of Abba Ammoes, who was very severe with him. Once the Elder took a dry stick, stuck it in the sand, and commanded John to water it every day until it bore fruit. Though this was plainly impossible, John performed the task uncomplainingly, walking a great distance to fetch the water, for three years. At the end of that time, the stick bore fruit. Abba Ammoes brought it to church the following Sunday and called out to the brethren, "Come and eat the fruit of obedience!" Though he had never praised or thanked his disciple, before he died Abba Ammoes said of John, "He is an angel, not a man." After his elder's repose, Abba John withdrew further into the desert, devoting all his time to vigil and prayer. As he

prayed he would weave baskets, which he sold to meet his few needs. Sometimes he was so rapt in prayer that he would keep weaving until the basket reached an absurd size, filling his cell.

When, after many years, Abba John was delivered from all evil thoughts, Abba Poemen (commemorated August 27) told him to pray to God for another temptation to struggle against, for only in this way does the soul make progress. He rejoiced when he was insulted, was never known to be angry with anyone, and would run away as fast as he could if he ever saw men quarreling. He reposed in peace.

"Pray earnestly with compunction and vigilance. Pay no attention to the faults of others. Do not measure yourself against other people, for you are lower than every creature." — Abba John the Dwarf

Holy Martyrs Onesiphorus and Porphyrius (284)

During the reign of Diocletian and Maximian, these pious Christians were arrested and brought before the judge, where they boldly proclaimed Christ the only true King and God. For this they were viciously tortured, but even when stretched on hot gridiron they gave thanks to God. The holy ones' joy infuriated their tormentors who finally tied them behind wild horses, who were set to gallop over rough countryside, tearing the two innocent martyrs to pieces. Pious Christians retrieved their relics and buried them at a town called Panceanon.

In an early account, Onesiphorus is identified with the companion whom St Paul mentions in 2 Timothy 4:19; this is not impossible, but most accounts do not mention this detail.

Our Holy Mother Matrona (492)

She was from Perga in Pamphylia, and married very young, to a youth named Domitian, to whom she bore a daughter. The couple settled in Constantinople. Matrona became so constant in attending all-night vigils in the city's many churches that her husband suspected her of infidelity and forbade her to go out. This was unbearable to Matrona, who fled the house with her daughter. Determined to embrace monastic life, she gave her daughter into the care of a nun named Susanna, disguised herself as a eunuch, and entered the monastery of St Bassian (October 10) under the name of Babylas. Though she amazed all with her zeal and ascetic labors, Bassian one day discerned that she was a woman. Though he reprimanded her severely, he was unwilling to drive her away from monastic life because of her zeal; so he directed her to go to Emesa in Syria to enter a women's monastery there.

Matrona continued to advance in the virtues, and once healed a blind man by anointing his eyes with myrrh from the head of St John the Baptist (which had been miraculously discovered around that time). The miracle became widely-known, and because of it Matrona's husband learned of her whereabouts. When he came to her monastery she escaped to Jerusalem, but he pursued her there too. She fled from place to place, even living for several

years in an abandoned pagan temple in Beirut, where she was constantly assaulted by the demons that inhabited the place. In time several pagan women, seeing her struggles, asked to be her disciples, and a small monastic community sprang up in the pagan temple. After a few years she and her disciples made their way back to to Constantinople, where St Bassian received her joyfully and helped her to establish a monastery. There she was visited by the Empress Verina, wife of Leo the Great, and many other noblewomen of the City, some of whom left all to join Matrona in monastic life. Saint Matrona lived to be almost one hundred years old and reposed in peace, having foretold the day of her death.

Saint Symeon Metaphrastes (960)

He was born in Constantinople, and through his exceptional intellect and learning rose to the rank of Logothete (Imperial Counselor), serving under three successive Emperors. He was so successful in negotiating with the Arabs who had occupied Crete that the Emperor Basil II asked him to name his own reward. Symeon asked only that he be allowed to retire from public service and become a monk. The Emperor, though sad to lose such a valuable counselor, let him go, asking that he pray for his sins.

In monastic life, Symeon continued to apply his gifts of learning: from scattered manuscripts and earlier anthologies, he assembled a collection of Lives of almost 150 Saints, a work which forms the basis of the Synaxaria in use today. He also compiled a Universal Chronicle and edited the treatises of several Fathers of the Church. Because of his skilled and diligent labors, he is called Metaphrastes, meaning 'Translator' or 'editor'. He is the author of many beautiful prayers still in regular use today (one is found in the Prayers of Preparation for Communion). At his repose, a sweet-smelling and healing myrrh flowed from his body.

Venerable Theoktisti of Lesbos

Venerable Euthymius of Dochiariou and his Disciple Neophytus

Day 09-Nov-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: 1 Thessalonians 2:9-14; Luke 11:14-23

9 Remember, brethren, our labor and hardship: we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to any of you as we preached to you the Good News of God.
10 You are witnesses with God, how holy, righteously, and blamelessly we behaved ourselves toward you who believe.
11 As you know, we exhorted, comforted, and implored every one of you, as a father does his own children, 12 with the purpose that you should live worthily of God who calls you into his own Kingdom and glory.
13 For this reason, we also thank God without ceasing that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth: the word of God.
And it is at work in you who believe! 14 Indeed, brethren, you became imitators of the Churches of God in Christ Jesus which are in Judea, for you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews.

Gospel Reading:

14 Jesus was casting out a demon which was mute, and when the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke and the people were amazed.
15 However, some of them said, 'He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of the demons!' 16 Others put him to the test and asked from him a sign from heaven.
17 But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said to them, 'Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation.
A house divided against itself falls.
18 If Satan is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul! 19 But if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore, they will be your judges.
20 However, if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come to you! 21When a strong man is fully armed and guards his own house, his goods are safe.
22 But when someone stronger attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up the spoils.
23 Whoever is not with me is against me! Whoever does not gather with me scatters!

Day 10-Nov-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Apostles of the Seventy Olympas, Rodion, Erastus, Sosipater and Quartus

All of these Apostles were among the Seventy, and all are mentioned by St Paul in Romans 16. Saints Olympas and Rodion followed St Peter to Rome and were beheaded under Nero around the year 54. The other three reposed in peace after serving the Church as bishops: St Sosipater as Bishop of Iconium; St Erastus (described by St Paul as city treasurer of Corinth) as Bishop of Paneas (Caesarea Philippi); St Quartus as Bishop of Beirut. Quartus is said to have converted most of the citizens of Beirut to faith in Christ before his repose.

Our Venerable Father Arsenios of Cappadocia, the Wonderworker (1924)

“Cappadocia (in eastern Turkey) is virtually devoid of Christians now, but in 1840, when St Arsenios was born there, there were still vital Orthodox communities. He became a monk and was sent to his native town, Farasa, to serve the people. He became known as a mighty intercessor before God, praying for all who came to him, Muslims as well as Christians. His countless miracles of healing became known throughout Cappadocia; those who could not come to see him would sometimes send articles of clothing for him to pray over. He became known as Hadjiefendis, a Muslim term of honour for pilgrims, because he made pilgrimage to the Holy Land every ten years on foot. He never accepted any gifts in return for his prayers and healings, saying ‘Our faith is not for sale!’

“He concealed his holiness as much as he could beneath a rough and sharp-tempered exterior. .

If anyone expressed admiration for him, he would reply "So you think I'm a saint? I'm only a sinner worse than you. Don't you see that I even lose my temper? The miracles you see are done by Christ. I do no more than lift up my hands and pray to him." But as the Scriptures say, the prayers of a righteous man avail much, and when St Arsenios lifted up his hands, wonders often followed.

“He lived in a small cell with an earthen floor, fasted often and was in the habit of shutting himself in his cell for at least two whole days every week to devote himself entirely to prayer.

“Father Arsenios predicted the expulsion of the Greeks from Asia Minor before it happened, and organized his flock for departure. When the expulsion order came in 1924, the aged Saint led his faithful on a 400-mile journey across Turkey on foot. .

He had foretold that he would only live forty days after reaching Greece, and this came to pass. His last words were "The soul, the soul, take care of it more than the flesh, which will return to earth and be eaten by worms!" Two days later, on November 10, 1924, he died in peace at the age of eighty-three. Since 1970, many apparitions and miracles have occurred near his holy relics, which reside in the Monastery of Souroti near Thessalonica. .
He was officially glorified by the Patriarchate of Constantinople in 1986."
— Source Orthodox Parish of St John of Kronstadt (UK)The primary source for the life of St Arsenios is Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian, compiled by Elder Païsios of the Holy Mountain, who was baptized as an infant by the Saint.

Holy Martyr Orestes
Saint Nonnus, Bishop of Heliopolis

Day 10-Nov-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 1 Thessalonians 2:14-19; Luke 11:23-26
14 Indeed, brethren, you became imitators of the Churches of God in Christ Jesus which are in Judea, for you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews.
15 They killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and they drove us out. Their conduct does not please God and makes them the enemies of the entire human race 16 as they want to prevent us from speaking to the Gentiles, so that they may be saved.
They are still bringing their sins to full measure, but the wrath is finally coming upon them.
17 Brethren, although we were deprived of your presence for a short time, (yet not in affection), we tried even harder to see you face to face with great eagerness, 18 because we wanted to come to you.
Certainly, I, Paul, wanted to come again and again- but Satan prevented us.
19 For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not you, when our Lord Jesus Christ comes? 20 Truly, you are our glory and our joy!
Gospel reading:

23 Whoever is not with me is against me! Whoever does not gather with me scatters! An evil spirit leaves and returns 24 When an unclean spirit has gone out of a person, he passes through dry places, seeking rest.
But finding no rest, the unclean spirit says, 'I will return to my house from which I came out.
25 When he returns, he finds it swept and put in order.
26 He then goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter in and dwell there.
The last state of that person becomes worse than the first.

Day 11-Nov-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Holy Martyr Menas (~304)

This holy Martyr was an Egyptian and a soldier during the reigns of Diocletian and Maximian. Though he was known for his valor in combat, he renounced his soldier's rank when his legion was ordered to seize Christians in north Africa. Fleeing to the mountains, he dwelt there for some time in silence and solitude, devoting his days to prayer. In time, he presented himself at a pagan festival, denounced the idols and declared himself a Christian. For this he was handed over to the governor of the city, who subjected him to horrible tortures and finally had him beheaded. Some faithful retrieved part of his relics and gave them honorable burial near Lake Mareotis, about thirty miles from Alexandria. The church built over his tomb became a place of pilgrimage not only for countless Egyptians but for Christians all over the world: evidence has been found of journeys to his shrine from as far away as Ireland.

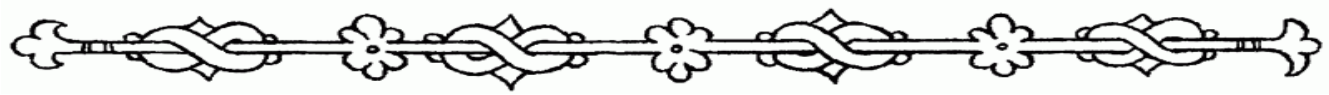
The Synaxarion gives an account of the Saint's intervention in the Second World War: "In June 1942, during the North-Africa campaign that was decisive for the outcome of the Second World War, the German forces under the command of General Rommel were on their way to Alexandria, and happened to make a halt near a place which the Arabs call El-Alamein after Saint Menas. An ancient ruined church there was dedicated to the Saint; and there some people say he is buried. Here the weaker Allied forces including some Greeks confronted the numerically and militarily superior German army, and the result of the coming battle seemed certain. During the first night of engagement, Saint Menas appeared in the midst of the German camp at the head of a caravan of camels, exactly as he was shown on the walls of the ruined church in one of the frescoes depicting his miracles. This astounding and terrifying apparition so undermined German morale that it contributed to the brilliant victory of the Allies. The Church of Saint Menas was restored in thanksgiving and a small monastery was established there."

Our Righteous Father Theodore the Studite (826)

"Saint Theodore the Studite was born in Constantinople in 759; his pious parents were named Photinus and Theoctiste. He assumed the monastic habit in his youth, at the monastery called Sakkoudion, and became abbot there in 794. About the year 784 he was ordained deacon, and later presbyter by the most holy Patriarch Tarasius. On joining the brotherhood of the Monastery of Studium (which was named after its founder Studius, a Roman consul), the Saint received the surname "Studite." He proved to be a fervent zealot for the traditions of the Fathers and contested even unto death for the sake of his reverence for the holy icons. He endured three exiles because of his pious zeal. During the third one, to which he was condemned by the Iconoclast autocrat, Leo the Armenian, he endured courageously being beaten and bound and led from one dark dungeon to another for seven whole years. Finally he was recalled from exile by Michael the Stutterer. Receiving thus a small respite from his labours of long endurance, he reposed in the Lord on November 11, 826, a Sunday, while his disciples, who stood round about him, chanted the 118th Psalm. Some say that after receiving the immaculate Mysteries, he himself began chanting this psalm. And on reaching the verse, "I will never forget Thy statutes, for in them hast Thou quickened me" (v. 93) he gave up his spirit, having lived for sixty-seven years. In addition to his other sacred writings, he composed, with the collaboration of his brother Joseph, almost the whole of the compunctionate book of the Triodion." (Great Horologion)

St Theodore helped to establish the Studion (or Stoudion) Monastery in Constantinople, and was its Abbot. Under his guidance the Stoudion Monastery became the leading center of Orthodox piety and Byzantine culture of its time. The monks lived a radically common life: they did not even have their own cells, but slept in large dormitories.

Holy Martyrs Victor and Stephanie
Holy Martyr Vincent the Deacon
Holy Martyr Stefan of Decani, King of Serbia



Day 11-Nov-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: 2 Corinthians 8:1-5; Luke 8:16-21

8 About giving Moreover, brethren, we want you to know about the grace that God has given in the Churches of Macedonia: 2in spite of extreme tribulations, the abundance of their joy (and their deep poverty) has resulted in generous giving.
3 I can testify that within their means and even beyond, they gave freely, 4begging us to receive the grace to have such a participation in the ministry to the saints.
5 We had not hoped for so much, but first they gave themselves to the Lord and to us, by the will of God.

Gospel Reading:

16 No one who has lit a lamp covers it with a lid, or puts it under a bed.
Instead, it is put on a stand so that those who enter in may see the light! 17
Nothing is hidden that will not be revealed.
Nothing is secret that will not be known and come to light.
18 Therefore, be careful how you hear.
Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him.
The Lord's true family 19 His mother and brothers came to him, but they could not come near him because of the crowd.
20 It was reported to him, 'Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see you.
21 But Jesus answered, 'My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.

Day 12-Nov-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Our Father among the Saints Martin, Bishop of Tours (397)

This holy and beloved Western Saint, the patron of France, was born in Pannonia (modern-day Hungary) in 316, to a pagan military family stationed there. Soon the family returned home to Italy, where Martin grew up. He began to go to church at the age of ten, and became a catechumen. Though he desired to become a monk, he first entered the army in obedience to his parents.

One day, when he was stationed in Amiens in Gaul, he met a poor man shivering for lack of clothing. He had already given all his money as alms, so he drew his sword, cut his soldier's cloak in half, and gave half of it to the poor man. That night Christ appeared to him, clothed in the half-cloak he had given away, and said to His angels, "Martin, though still a catechumen, has clothed me in this garment." Martin was baptised soon afterward. Though he still desired to become a monk, he did not obtain his discharge from the army until many years later, in 356.

He soon became a disciple of St Hilary of Poitiers (commemorated January 13), the "Athanasius of the West." After traveling in Pannonia and Italy (where he converted his mother to faith in Christ), he returned to Gaul, where the Arian heretics were gaining much ground. Not long afterward became Bishop of Tours, where he shone as a shepherd of the Church: bringing pagans to the faith, healing the sick, establishing monastic life throughout Gaul, and battling the Arian heresy so widespread throughout the West. Finding the episcopal residence too grand, he lived in a rude, isolated wooden hut, even while fulfilling all the duties of a Bishop of the Church.

His severity against heresy was always accompanied by love and kindness toward all: he once traveled to plead with the Emperor Maximus to preserve the lives of some Priscillianist heretics whom the Emperor meant to execute.

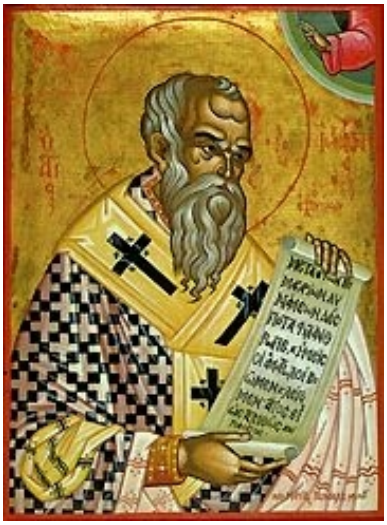
As the holy Bishop lay dying in 397, the devil appeared to tempt him one last time. The Saint said, "You will find nothing in me that belongs to you. Abraham's bosom is about to receive me." With these words he gave up his

soul to God.

He is the first confessor who was not a martyr to be named a Saint in the West. His biographer, Sulpitius Severus, wrote of him: "Martin never let an hour or a moment go by without giving himself to prayer or to reading and, even as he read or was otherwise occupied, he never ceased from prayer to God. He was never seen out of temper or disturbed, distressed or laughing. Always one and the same, his face invariably shining with heavenly joy, he seemed to have surpassed human nature. In his mouth was nothing but the Name of Christ and in his soul nothing but love, peace and mercy."

Note: St Martin is commemorated on this day in the Greek and Slavic Synaxaria; his commemoration in the West, where he is especially honored, is on November 11.

Our Father among the Saints John the Merciful, Patriarch of Alexandria (619)



He was the son of a noble family in Cyprus. He married and had several children, but when his wife and children all died at nearly the same time, he took his loss as a call to forsake worldly cares, and committed his life entirely to God. In time he was consecrated Archbishop of Alexandria, where he became known for his zeal for the Orthodox faith and his struggles against the various heresies that prevailed in Egypt at that time. Most of all, though, he was known for the amazing purity of his generosity and compassion toward all.

On the day of his elevation to the Patriarchate, he ordered a careful census of his "masters," as he called the poor and beggars. It was found that there were 7,500 indigents in the city, and St John ordered that all of them be clothed and fed every day out of the Church's wealth. In his prayers he would say "We will see, Lord, which of us will win this contest: You, who constantly give me good gifts, or I, who will never stop giving them away to the poor. For I have nothing that does not come to me by Thy mercy, which upholds my life."

His lack of judgment in giving to the poor sometimes dismayed those around him. Once a wily beggar came to John four times in four different disguises, receiving alms each time. When the holy Patriarch was told of this, he ordered that the man be given twice as much, saying "Perhaps he is Jesus my Savior, who has come on purpose to put me to the test." Still, the more generously he gave, the more generously God granted gifts to the Church, so that money was never lacking either for the poor or for the Church's own real needs. One of the clergy once gave only a third of what the Patriarch instructed to a rich man who had fallen into poverty, thinking that the Church's treasury could not afford to give so much. Saint John then revealed to him that a noblewoman who had planned to give an enormous gift to the Church had,

shortly thereafter, given only a third of what she originally planned.

Once, when he was serving the Divine Liturgy at the Cathedral, the Patriarch stopped just before the consecration, instructed the deacon to repeat the litanies, and sent for one of his clergy who bore a grudge against him and would not come to church. When the man came, the Patriarch prostrated himself before him and, with tears, begged his forgiveness. When they were reconciled, he returned to the altar and proceeded with the service.

Though the Patriarch lived in a well-appointed palace befitting his rank, he owned no property and lived in a humble cell within the palace. A godly citizen, knowing his poverty, once gave him a fine blanket. The Saint immediately sold the blanket and gave the proceeds to the poor. The donor, however, found his gift for sale in a shop, bought it, and gave it again to the Patriarch. The Patriarch again sold it, and the donor again found it and gave it. The Synaxarion says, "As neither of them would give in, the bed-cover passed through their hands a good many times and was the means whereby John indirectly prevailed on the rich man to give away a great fortune to the poor."

Despite his generosity, the Patriarch was firm with the Monophysite heretics. Though he gave them all that he could whenever they were in need, he instructed the Orthodox faithful never to worship or pray with them.

At his own request, the Patriarch returned to Cyprus where, in 619, he died at the age of 64. In his last hours, he gave thanks to God that nothing remained of the riches of which he had been given stewardship for the sake of the poor.

Our Holy Father Nilus the Ascetic of Sinai (430)

He served as Prefect of Constantinople during the reign of the Emperor Theodosius. He was married and had two children, a son and a daughter. Despising their eminent worldly position, Nilus and his wife agreed to take up the monastic life in Egypt, she taking their daughter to a women's monastery, he taking their son to Mount Sinai. Together Nilus and his son Theodoulos lived in hesychia on the slopes of the mountain with the other monks, who spent their lives in solitude, only gathering once a week to partake of the Mysteries. One day some Saracen raiders attacked the monks, killing many and capturing others; Nilus' own son Theodoulos was among those taken. Nilus, to overcome his sorrow at losing his son, redoubled his prayers and ascetical labors, and became widely-known for his gifts of prophecy and discernment. He wrote more than a thousand letters and spiritual treatises, including some defending his spiritual father St John Chrysostom, who had been unjustly exiled.

After many years at Mt Sinai, St Nilus found his long-lost son alive. Father and son together were ordained to the priesthood by the Bishop of Elusas, who had been caring for Theodoulos. Saint Nilus reposed in peace around the year 430. His relics were later returned to Constantinople and venerated at the Church of the Orphanage.

St Nilus the Myrrh-Gusher of Mt Athos (1651)

He was born around the end of the sixteenth century in southern Greece. At an early age he entered into monastic life and in time found an isolated cave on the southern cliffs of Mt Athos, devoting his days to prayer, unknown to almost everyone. He reposed in peace in 1651 and was buried near his cave. A fragrant myrrh flowed from his body so copiously that it formed a stream flowing into the sea below; many people came in boats to collect the myrrh, which healed many ailments. One of his disciples, disturbed by the steady procession of visitors, complained in prayer to the Saint, and the flow of myrrh instantly stopped, never to resume.

Holy Prophet Ahijah of Shiloh

Day 12-Nov-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

The Parable of the Good Samaritan
Ephesians 4:1-6; Luke 10:25-37
1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus, faithful in Christ Jesus: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! God's purpose 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.
4 He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, so that we would be holy and without blemish before him in love.
5 He also foreordained us for adoption {as his children} through Jesus Christ according to his purpose and will.
6 This is to the praise of the glory of his grace, by which he freely bestowed favor on us in the Beloved.

Gospel Reading: The Parable of the Good Samaritan

25 Behold, an expert in the law stood up and put him to the test, saying, 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' 26 Jesus answered, 'What is written in the law? How do you read it?' 27 The man answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind;e and your neighbor as yourself.
28 Jesus said to him, 'You have answered correctly.

Do this, and you will live.
29 But the lawyer, desiring to justify himself, asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?' 30 Jesus answered, 'A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when he fell into the hands of robbers.
They stripped him of his clothes and beat him.
Then they went away, leaving him half-dead.
31 By chance, a certain priest was going down that way.
But when the priest saw him, he passed by on the other side.
32 In the same way, a Levite also came to the place, but when he saw the beaten man, he [also] passed by on the other side.
33 Now, a certain Samaritan was traveling and arrived at the spot where the man was.
When the Samaritan saw the wounded man,a he was moved with compassion, 34 came to him, and wrapped his wounds, pouring on oil and wine.
He placed the man on his own animal and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.
35 On the next day, when he was leaving, he took out two denarii and gave them to the host, saying to him, 'Take care of him.
Whatever you spend beyond that, I will pay you back when I return.
36 Now, which one of these three do you think seemed to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?' 37 The lawyer replied, 'The one who showed mercy on him!' Then Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING
Who is my neighbour? lawyer asked Jesus Our Lord, or rather tested Him saying 'What shall I do to inherit eternal life"? Our Lord gives us and the lawyer the parable of the Good Samaritan, having been pressed by the lawyer who wished to justify himself.
The lawyer understood the importance of loving God with one’s whole being and one’s neighbour as oneself.
But the lawyer having listened then asked, 'And who is my neighbour?' Often when we read the parable of the Good Samaritan we interpret it from the perspective of good works? Or perhaps we may really mean, are there people who are not my neighbour? Jesus clearly makes the point that there are no limits.
At all times and all places we are called to act with compassion no matter who it is. More to the point when Jesus asks ‘Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise." The question is not who is our neighbour but rather will I be a neighbour to another person? One may well assume that a neighbour connotes a form of friendship or kinship whereby I may well be called to act with compassion on anyone I meet whatever colour, caste, creed, nationality or race.
We are all members of the human race.

We often fail to get involved with our neighbour the stranger for innumerable reasons, which may include laziness, fear of danger, wondering about the cost, both, financially or nervously.
We may fear we are wasting our time.
We ask is this a risky undertaking? We are however called to go the extra mile.
Origen Adamantius, a third century Christian writer, martyr and theologian from Alexandria interpreted the parable by saying: "The man who was going down is Adam.
Jerusalem is paradise, and Jericho is the world.
The robbers are hostile powers.
The priest is the Law, the Levite is the prophets, and the Samaritan is Christ.
The wounds are disobedience; the beast [animal] is the Lord's body, the [inn], which accepts all who wish to enter, is the Church.
... The manager of the [inn] is the head of the Church, to whom its care has been entrusted.
And the fact that the Samaritan promises he will return represents the Saviour's second coming." The Good Samaritan is Our Saviour.
He is the outsider who pours out grace upon us.
The Church is the inn where we are healed and cared for.
He took no care for Himself, not counting the cost, not considering the dangers or risks for Himself.
Tolstoy in a parable asked 'when is the right time to do the right thing, or when is the best time to do each thing? Who are the people I most need, and to whom, therefore, should I pay more attention to than the rest, or who are the most important people to work with? What affairs are the most important and need my attention first, or what is the most important thing to do at all times? 'Remember that there is only one important time, and that time is now.
The most important one is always the one you are with.
And the most important thing is to do good for the one who is standing at your side.
For these, are the answers to what is most important in this world.
This is why we are here.
' Who is before us then? It is the Lord who is both the Good Samaritan and our wounded neighbour.
'Helping a person in need is good in itself.
But the degree of goodness is hugely affected by the attitude with which it is done.
If you show resentment because you are helping the person out of a reluctant sense of duty, then the person may receive your help but may feel awkward and embarrassed.
This is because he will feel beholden to you.
If, on the other hand, you help the person in a spirit of joy, then the help will be received joyfully.
The person will feel neither demeaned nor humiliated by your help, but rather will

feel glad to have caused you pleasure by receiving your help.
And joy is the appropriate attitude with which to help others because acts of generosity are a source of blessing to the giver as well as the receiver.
' (St. John Chrysostom)

Day 13-Nov-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Saint John Chrysostom, Patriarch of Constantinople

John was born in Antioch in the year 354. His father, Secundus, was an imperial commander and his mother's name was Anthusa. Studying Greek philoshophy, John became disgusted with Hellenic paganism and adopted the Christian Faith as the one and all-embracing truth. Meletius, Patriarch of Antioch, baptized John, and his parents also subsequently received baptism. Following his parents' repose, John was tonsured a monk and lived a strict life of asceticism. He then wrote a book, On the Priesthood, after which the Holy Apostles John and Peter appeared to him, and prophesied that he would have a life of great service, great grace and great suffering. When he was to be ordained a priest, an angel of God appeared simultaneously to John and to Patriarch Flavian (Meletius's successor). While the patriarch was ordaining John, a shining white dove was seen hovering over John's head. Glorified for his wisdom, asceticism and power of words, John was chosen as Patriarch of Constantinople at the behest of Emperor Arcadius. As patriarch, he governed the Church for six years with unequalled zeal and wisdom. He sent missionaries to the pagan Celts and Scythians and eradicated simony in the Church, deposing many bishops guilty of this vice. He extended the charitable works of the Church and wrote a special order of the Divine Liturgy. He shamed the heretics, denounced Empress Eudoxia, interpreted Holy Scripture with his golden mind and tongue, and bequeathed the Church many precious books of his homilies. The people glorified him, the envious loathed him, and the Empress, on two occasions, sent him into exile. John spent three years in exile, and reposed as an exile on the Feast of the Elevation of the Precious and Life-giving Cross, September 14, 407, in the town of Comana in Georgia. Before his repose, the Holy Apostles John and Peter appeared to him again, as did the Holy Martyr Basiliscus (May 22) in whose church he received Communion for the last time. His last words were, 'Glory be to God for all things,' and with that, the soul of the golden-mouthed patriarch was taken into Paradise. Chrysostom's head reposes in the Church of the Dormition in Moscow, and his body reposes in the [Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople]. His repose was on September 14, but since that is the date of the Exaltation of the Cross, his commemoration has been transferred to this day.

Source: St. Nikolai Velimirovic, The Prologue of Ohrid – Volume Two.

Apolytikion

The grace of your words illuminated the universe like a shining beacon. It amassed treasures of munificence in the world. It demonstrated the greatness of humility, teaching us by your own words; therefore, O Father John Chrysostom, intercede to Christ the Logos for the salvation of our souls.

Venerable New Martyr Damaskinos of Mount Athos

Day 13-Nov-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 1 Thessalonians 2:20-3:8; Luke 11:29-33
20 Truly, you are our glory and our joy! 3 Therefore, when we could not stand it
any longer, we thought that it would be good to be alone in Athens 2and to send
Timothy, our brother and God's minister in the Good News of Christ, so that he
might confirm and comfort you in your faith, 3 and that no one would be shaken by
these afflictions.
For you know that these must come our way.
4 This is certain, and when we were with you, we told you in advance that we must
suffer affliction.
And this is what happened, as you know.
5 For this reason, when I could not stand it any longer, I sent Timothy so that I
might know your faith, fearing that in some way the tempter may have tempted
you, so that our labor would have been in vain.
6 But Timothy came back from his visit to you and brought us glad news of your
faith and love.
He mentioned your abiding good memories of us as well as your longing to see us
just as we also long to see you.
7 Through all this, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our distress and
affliction through your faith.
8 Now we have revived, since you stand fast in the Lord!

Gospel Reading:
29 As the crowds were increasing, he began to say, 'This is an evil generation; it
asks for a sign.
No sign will be given to this generation except the sign of Jonah the prophet.
30 For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, the Son of Man will also be a
sign to this generation.
31 The Queen of the South will rise up in the judgment along with the people of
this generation, and she will condemn them: for she came from the ends of the
earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, someone greater than Solomon
is here! 32 The people of Nineveh will stand up in the judgment with this
generation and they will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of
Jonah, and behold, someone greater than Jonah is here.
The lamp of the body 33 No one who has lit a lamp puts it in a cellar or under a

basket! Instead, it is placed on a stand so that those who come in may see the light.

Day 14-Nov-2023 Tuesday

Nativity Fast begins, Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Apostle Philip

He was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and a diligent student of the Law and the Prophets. When he first met Jesus, he followed Him right away and told Nathanael, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote" (John 1) After Christ's Ascension, Philip was chosen to proclaim the Gospel in Asia (the western province of Asia Minor). He traveled with Bartholomew (commemorated June 11) and his sister Mariamne, all of them joyfully enduring great sufferings and persecutions in the Lord's service. In Hierapolis in Phrygia, they healed the Governor's wife of an eye affliction, and she believed in the Lord. The Governor was so infuriated by this that he had Philip crucified upside-down. At the moment he gave up his soul to God, the ground opened, swallowing up a great many pagan priests and the Governor. Many of the surviving pagans, terrified, believed in Christ and were baptized by Bartholomew. Saint Bartholomew went on to preach the Gospel in many places; Mariamne traveled to the Jordan River, where she reposed in peace.

Among the Slavic peoples, the Nativity Fast is often called Filipovka since it commences immediately after this feast.

St Gregory Palamas (1359)

The teaching of St Gregory is so fundamental to Orthodoxy that he is especially commemorated each year in Great Lent on the Sunday following the Sunday of Orthodoxy (as well as on Nov. 14); Bishop Kallistos observes in the English edition of the Philokalia, "his successful defence of the divine and uncreated character of the light of Tabor...[is] seen as a direct continuation of the preceding celebration, as nothing less than a renewed Triumph of Orthodoxy."

The son of a prominent family, St Gregory was born (1296) and raised in Constantinople. At about age twenty, he abandoned a promising secular career to become a monk on Mt Athos. (His family joined him en masse: two of his brothers went with him to the Holy Mountain; at the same time his

widowed mother, two of his sisters, and many of the household servants also entered monastic life.) He spent the next twenty years living as a hermit, spending five days a week in complete solitude, then joining the brethren on weekends for the Divine Liturgy and its accompanying services.

Around 1335 he was called to live a much more public life in defense of the faith and spirituality of the Church. A Greek living in Italy, Barlaam the Calabrian, had launched an attack on the hesychastic spirituality of the Church. Fundamentally, Barlaam denied that man can attain to a true vision of God Himself, or true union with Him, in this life. Gregory, recognizing in this an attack on the Christian faith itself, responded. He even left the Holy Mountain and re-settled in Constantinople so as better to wage the struggle, which had become so public that a Church Council was called to settle the issue. St Gregory's views were affirmed, and Barlaam's condemned, at the Council of Constantinople of 1341.

Though Barlaam himself returned to Italy, a series of his followers continued the attack, eventually resulting in two more Councils in 1347 and 1351, both of which affirmed the hesychasts' position. Metropolitan Hierotheos (The Mind of the Orthodox Church) writes that these councils have "all the marks of an Ecumenical Council." This, along with the fact that St Gregory's views are affirmed in the Synodikon of Orthodoxy (appointed to be read in churches every Sunday of Orthodoxy), and his commemoration every second Sunday of Great Lent, makes clear that his teaching is a basic and indispensable part of the Orthodox Faith.

In 1347 St Gregory was consecrated Metropolitan of Thessaloniki, where he served until his repose. (He spent a year of this period as the prisoner of Turkish pirates). Despite (or due to?) his austere monastic background, he was revered by his flock: immediately after his repose in 1359, popular veneration of him sprang up in Thessaloniki, Constantinople and Mt Athos and, in 1368, only nine years after his death, the Church officially glorified him as a saint.

St Gregory was always clear that unceasing mental prayer is not a special calling of monastics, but is possible and desirable for every Christian in every walk of life. See his On the Necessity of Constant Prayer for all Christians. **Let no one think, my brother Christians, that it is the duty only of priests and monks to pray without ceasing, and not of laymen.**

No, no; it is the duty of all of us Christians to remain always in prayer.

For look what the most holy Patriarch of Constantinople, Philotheus, writes in his life of St. Gregory of Thessalonica. This saint had a beloved friend by the name of Job, a very simple but most virtuous man. Once, while conversing with him, His Eminence said of prayer that every Christian in general should strive to pray always, and to pray without ceasing, as Apostle Paul commands all Christians, "Pray without ceasing" (I Thessalonians 5:17), and as the prophet David says of himself, although he was a king and had to concern himself with his whole kingdom: "I foresaw the Lord always before my face" (Psalms 15:8), that is, in my prayer I always mentally see the Lord before me. Gregory the Theologian also teaches all Christians to say God's name in prayer more often than to breathe.

So, my Christian brethren, I too implore you, together also with St. Chrysostom, for the sake of saving your souls, do not neglect the practice of this prayer. Imitate those I have mentioned and follow in their footsteps as far as you can.

At first it may appear very difficult to you, but be assured, as it were from Almighty God, that this very name of our Lord Jesus Christ, constantly invoked by you, will help you to overcome all difficulties, and in the course of time you will become used to this practice and will taste how sweet is the name of the Lord. Then you will learn by experience that this practice is not impossible and not difficult, but both possible and easy. This is why St. Paul, who knew better than we the great good which such prayer would bring, commanded us to pray without ceasing. He would not have imposed this obligation upon us if it were extremely difficult and impossible, for he knew beforehand that in such case, having no possibility of fulfilling it, we would inevitably prove to be disobedient and would transgress his commandment, thus incurring blame and condemnation. The Apostle could have had no such intention.

Moreover, bear in mind the method of prayer – how it is possible to pray without ceasing, namely by praying in the mind. And this we can always do if we so wish. For when we sit down to work with our hands, when we walk, when we eat, when we drink we can always pray mentally and practice this mental prayer – the true prayer pleasing to God. Let us work with the body and pray with the soul. Let our outer man perform his bodily tasks, and let the inner man be entirely dedicated to the service of God, never abandoning this spiritual practice of mental prayer, as Jesus, God and Man, commanded us, saying: "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret" (Matthew 6:6).

The closet of the soul is the body; our doors are the five bodily senses. The soul enters its closet when the mind does not wander hither and thither,

roaming among things and affairs of the world, but stays within, in our heart. Our senses become closed and remain closed when we do not let them be attached to external sensory things, and in this way our mind remains free from every worldly attachment, and by secret mental prayer unites with God its Father. "And thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly," adds the Lord. God who knows all secret things sees mental prayer and rewards it openly with great gifts. For that prayer is true and perfect which fills the soul with Divine grace and spiritual gifts. As chrism perfumes the jar the more strongly the tighter it is closed, so prayer, the more fast it is imprisoned in the heart, abounds the more in Divine grace.

Blessed are those who acquire the habit of this heavenly practice, for by it they overcome every temptation of the evil demons, as David overcame the proud Goliath. It extinguishes the unruly lusts of the flesh, as the three men extinguished the flames of the furnace. This practice of inner prayer tames passions as Daniel tamed the wild beasts. By it the dew of the Holy spirit is brought down upon the heart, as Elijah brought down rain on Mount Carmel. This mental prayer reaches to the very throne of God and is preserved in golden vials, sending forth their odors before the Lord, as John the Divine saw in the Revelation, "Four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of the saints" (Revelation 5:8).

This mental prayer is the light which illumines man’s soul and inflames his heart with the fire of love of God. It is the chain linking God with man and man with God. Oh the incomparable blessing of mental prayer! It allows a man constantly to converse with God. Oh truly wonderful and more than wonderful – to be with one’s body among men while in one’s mind conversing with God. Angels have no physical voice, but mentally never cease to sing glory to God. This is their sole occupation and all their life is dedicated to this.

So, brother, when you enter your closet and close your door, that is, when your mind is not darting hither and thither but enters within your heart, and your senses are confined and barred against things of this world, and when you pray thus always, you too are then like the holy angels, and your Father, Who sees your prayer in secret, which you bring Him in the hidden depths of your heart, will reward you openly by great spiritual gifts.

But what other and greater rewards can you wish from this when, as I said, you are mentally always before the face of God and are constantly conversing with Him – conversing with God, without Whom no man can ever be blessed either here or in another life?

Finally, my brother, whoever you may be, when you take up this book and, having read it, wish to test in practice the profit which mental prayer brings to the soul, I beg you, when you begin to pray thus, pray God with one invocation, "Lord have mercy," for the soul of him who has worked on compiling this book and of him who helped to give it to the public. For they have great need of your prayer to receive God's mercy for their soul, as you for yours. May it be so! May it be so!

St Gregory Palamas, from "Early Fathers From the Philokalia," translated from the Russian text, "Dobrotolubiye," by E. Kadloubovsky and G.E.H. Palmer, eighth edition, (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1981), pp. 412 - 415

Pious Emperor Justinian and His Wife Theodora (565)

"The pious Emperor Justinian was a fervent Christian and a man of genius in every field. His long reign (527-65) was a decisive period in the history of the Empire from the administrative, diplomatic, military, economic, legal, cultural and ecclesiastical points of view. He was the real founder of the Christian Empire, who brought together again the old Roman Empire that had been torn to pieces by barbarian invaders. He believed that upholding the Orthodox faith and maintaining the symphony of Church and State were essential for the well-being of the Empire. He had a deep knowledge of theology and wrote several treatises on dogmas of the faith. He forbad pagan worship in the Empire, and was unremitting in pursuit of heretics and sectarians. He did all he could to reconcile the Monophysites to the Council of Chalcedon. In 553, he summoned to Constantinople the fifth Ecumentical Council (25 July), which reaffirmed the condemnation of Nestorius and also condemned Origen.

"The splendor of the churches and of everything that testified to the divine glory was brought to a culmination in the Empire of Justinian. He rebuilt the Great Church of Saint Sophia in Constantinople where, it was said, the service of God was so wonderfully ordered that it was as if heaven had come down to earth. He made great gifts to the monasteries of Egypt and of Palestine and built the Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai. In all that he did, he had the help and support of his wife, the pious Empress Theodora. Justinian died on 14 November 565, without having been able to restore full unity to the Church, but he had set the Empire on firm foundations that would endure for centuries." (Synaxarion)

It was Justinian who built the great Church of the Holy Wisdom (Agia Sophia), perhaps the most magnificent Christian church. The hymn "Only-begotten Son" was inserted in the Divine Liturgy at his command, and is thought to have been composed by him.

Note: There is some controversy about the inclusion of Justinian in the Synaxaria. His fervent labors to reconcile the Monophysites to the Church have led some writers to conclude that he himself embraced Monophysite

errors; others dispute this. Lacking the wisdom to resolve the question, we only note that he is included in Ormylia Monastery's Synaxarion (quoted above), but some Synaxaria have turned his commemoration into that of the Emperor Justin (518-527).

Constantine the New Martyr of Hydra

Venerable Euphimian of Cyprus

Day 14-Nov-2023 Tuesday

Nativity Fast begins, Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13; Luke 11:34-41
9 What thanksgiving can we give back to God for you, for all the joy you give us to experience before our God? 10 Yes, night and day, I pray intensely so that we may see you again and make perfect what is lacking in your faith.
11 Now, may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you.
12 May the Lord grant you to increase and overflow in love one for each other and for everyone, even as we also do for you.
13 And may the Lord establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father even to the end, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Gospel Reading:
34 The lamp of the body is the eye! Therefore, when your eye is healthy,a your whole body is also full of light; but when it is evil, your body also is full of darkness!
35 And so, see whether the light that is in you is not darkness.
36 If your whole body is full of light, having no dark part, it will be completely full of light, as when the lamp with its bright shining gives you light.
37 Now, as Jesus was speaking, a certain Pharisee asked him to have dinner with him.
Jesus went in, and reclined at the table.
38 When the Pharisee saw it, he was astonished that Jesus had not first washed himself before dinner.
39 But the Lord said to him, 'You Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and platter, but your inside is full of extortion and wickedness.
40 You fools! Did not the one who made the outside also make the inside?
41 But as for what is inside you, be generous to the needy, and behold, all things will be clean to you.

Day 15-Nov-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Our Venerable Father Paisius Velichkovsky (1794)

He was born in Ukraine in 1722, one of the many children of a priest. He attended the Ecclesiastical Academy in Kiev, but was disappointed by the worldliness, love of ease and western theological climate that he found there.

After four years he left the school and embarked on a search for a spiritual father and a monastery where he could live in poverty. He eventually found wise spiritual guides in Romania, where many of the Russian monks had fled after Peter the Great's reforms. From there he traveled to the Holy Mountain. Spiritual life was at a low ebb there also, and Plato (the name he had been given as a novice) became a hermit, devoting his days to prayer and reading the Holy Scriptures and the writings of the Fathers. After four years, a visiting Elder from Romania tonsured him a monk under the name Paisius, and advised him to live with other monks to avoid the spiritual dangers of taking up the solitary life too soon. A few brethren from Romania arrived, seeking to make him their spiritual father, but as he felt unworthy to take on this task, all of them lived in poverty and mutual obedience. Others joined them from Romania and the Slavic countries, and in time they took up the cenobitic life, with Paisius as their reluctant abbot.

In 1763 the entire community (grown to sixty-five in number) left the Holy Mountain and returned to Romania. They were given a monastery where they adopted the Athonite rule of life. Abbot Paisius introduced the Jesus Prayer and other aspects of hesychasm to the monastic life there: before this time, they had been used mostly by hermits. The services of the Church were conducted fully, with the choirs chanting alternately in Slavonic and Romanian. The monks confessed to their Elder every evening so as not to let the sun go down on their anger, and a brother who held a grudge against another was forbidden to enter the church, or even to say the Lord's Prayer, until he had settled it.

The monastic brotherhood eventually grew to more than a thousand,

divided into two monasteries. Visitors and pilgrims came from Russia, Greece and other lands to experience its holy example.

St Paisius had learned Greek while on Mt Athos, and undertook to produce accurate Slavonic translations of the writings of many of the Fathers of the Church. The Greek Philokalia had been published not long before, and St Paisius produced a Slavonic version that was read throughout the Slavic Orthodox world. (This is the Philokalia that the pilgrim carries with him in The Way of a Pilgrim).

The Saint reposed in peace in 1794, one year after the publication of his Slavonic Philokalia. The Synaxarion summarizes his influence: "These translations, and the influence of the Saint through the activity of his disciples in Russia, led to a widespread spiritual renewal, and to the restoration of traditional monastic life there which lasted until the Revolution of 1917."

Beginning of the Nativity Fast
Guria, Shamuna and Habib, Martyrs and Confessors of Edessa
Holy Martyrs Elpidius, Marcellus and Eustochius
Holy Martyr Demetrius
Saint Thomas, Patriarch of Constantinople

Day 15-Nov-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12; Luke 11:42-46
4 Exhortations- Brotherly love As for other matters, brethren, we beg and exhort you in the Lord Jesus: as you received from us how you should live to please God, do so even more! 2 Certainly, you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.
3 This is the will of God: your sanctification, and that you abstain from sexual immorality.
4 Each one of you should know how to practice self-control of the body in sanctification and honor,
5 not in lustful passions, as Gentiles who do not know God.
6 No one should take advantage of or wrong a brother [or sister] in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as also we warned you and testified to you.
7 Truly, God did not call us for impurity but to sanctification!
8 Therefore, whoever rejects this does not reject a human [command] but God, who has also given you his Holy Spirit.
9 But concerning brotherly love, you have no need that anyone should write to you since you have learned from God how to love one another,
10 and this is what you do toward all the brethren who are throughout Macedonia. Yet, we exhort you, brethren, to overflow even more!
11 Make it your goal to lead a quiet life, to take care of your own affairs, and to work with your own hands, even as we instructed you.
12 Thus, you will live properly in the sight of those who are 'outside' and you will lack nothing.

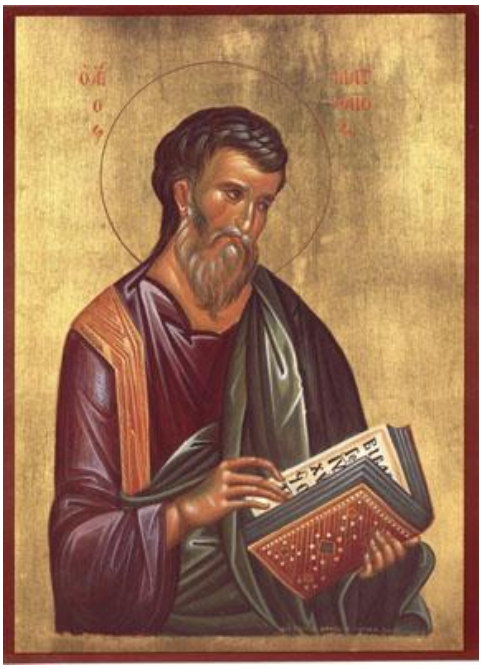
Gospel Reading:
42 But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, but you bypass justice and the love of God.
You should have done these while not leaving the other undone.
43 Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seats in the synagogues and the greetings in the marketplaces.
44 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You are like hidden graves, and people who walk over them do not [even] know it.
45 One of the experts in the law exclaimed, 'Teacher, in saying this you insult us

also.
46 Jesus said, 'Woe to you lawyers also! For you load men with burdens that are difficult to carry, and you yourselves will not even lift one finger to help carry those burdens!

Day 16-Nov-2023 Thursday

Fast Day/ oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Holy Apostle and Evangelist Matthew



He was a Galilean, the son of Alphaeus, and was originally named Levi. He was a tax-collector (an occupation despised by the Jews of Palestine) until he met the Lord, who said to him, "Follow me." From that day he was one of the disciples.

After the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the Apostle was appointed to bring the Gospel to his fellow Jews, for whom, according to the Church's tradition, he wrote down the Gospel for the first time, in the Aramaic language, eight years after the Ascension. Some years later, this book was translated into Greek by St James, the first Bishop of Jerusalem. No copy in the original language has survived.

Later, St Matthew traveled to Parthia and the city of Hierapolis (on the Euphrates river) to proclaim the Gospel to the pagans there. One tradition holds that he reposed in peace in that region at a great age. Another tradition holds that he was martyred by a king of that region, who later repented and was baptized, taking the name Matthew. The king then cast down the idols and established the Christian faith in his realm.

When St Matthew is portrayed in icons, the likeness of a man is shown with him, one of the four living creatures spoken of in the first chapter of Ezekiel. St Irenaeus writes that the man symbolizes Christ's Incarnation.

Venerable Sergius of Malopinega

Day 16-Nov-2023 Thursday

Fast Day/ oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.
Readings of the day: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-8; Luke 11:47-12:1
5 The Lord comes like a thief in the night But concerning the times and seasons,
brethren, you have no need that anything be written to you.
2 You know well that the day of the Lord comes like a thief in the night.
3 When people say, 'Peace and safety,' then a sudden destruction will come upon
them, like birth pains on a pregnant woman, and they will by no means escape.
4 As for you, brethren, you are not in darkness to allow the day to overtake you
like a thief.
5 You are all children of light, and children of the day.
We do not belong to the night, or to the darkness.
6 Therefore, let us not sleep as others do, but let us watch and be clear minded.
7 Those who sleep, sleep in the night, and those who are drunk are drunk in the
night.
8 But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith
and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.

Gospel Reading:
47 Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and your fathers killed
them.
48 And so, you testify and consent to the works of your fathers! For they killed the
prophets, and you build their tombs.
49 Therefore, the wisdom of God also said, 'I will send them prophets and
apostles.
Some of them they will kill and persecute, 50 so that the blood of all the prophets,
which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this
generation; 51 from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zachariah who perished
between the altar and the sanctuary.
Yes, I tell you that this generation will be charged with this blood.
52 Woe to you experts of the law! You have taken away the key to knowledge; you
yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering.
53 As he said these things to them, the scribes and Pharisees began a furious
attack on him and tried to force answers from him on many questions.
54 They were lying in wait for him and seeking to catch him in something he might
say,a in order to accuse him.
12 Meanwhile, a crowd of many thousands had gathered, to the point that they

trampled on each other.
Jesus began to speak, first of all to his disciples, 'Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy.

Day 17-Nov-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Gennadios I, Patriarch of Constantinople

Our Venerable Father Gregory the Wonderworker, Bishop of Neocaesarea (~275)

He was born to a prominent pagan family in Neocaesarea, where Christianity was at the time almost unknown. Nonetheless, Gregory found and embraced the faith of Christ at an early age. His parents educated him at the finest schools of the day in Athens, Alexandria, and Beirut; he and his brother spent five years studying under the great Origen, though, the Synaxarion is quick to note, "They possessed enough discernment, however, to avoid certain errors into which Origen was led by the excessive boldness of his speculations about the mysteries of God."

Refusing many tempting offers of worldly position, Gregory withdrew to the wilderness to live in ascesis. However, the Archbishop of Amesia, familiar with his holiness and ability, consecrated him Bishop of Neocaesarea against his will, and Gregory in obedience took up his see at about the age of thirty.

When he entered the city as bishop, it contained only seventeen Christians. Through the Saint's tireless and grace-filled preaching, and through the steady stream of miracles that he wrought there, he brought so many to the faith that when he died, only seventeen of the city's inhabitants were still pagans.

Bishop Gregory's countless miracles were so famed that he became known to all as the Wonderworker. Once, the Most Holy Mother of God appeared to him with Saint John the Theologian and revealed divine mysteries to him directly, a grace granted to very few. Even his detractors called him a second Moses. He reposed in peace in 275.

Our Holy Father Longinus (4th or 5th c.)

"Our holy Father Longinus lived in the Egyptian deserts during the fourth or fifth century. Among other sayings of his, are the following: A dead man judges no one, and it is just the same with the man who is humble. To someone who wanted to go to live in exile, he replied: Unless you guard your tongue, you will not be able to live in exile wherever you go. To someone else who wanted to live in solitude, he said: If you do not exercise the virtues in the midst of men, still less will you be able to do so in solitude. By his life and his words he taught love of humility as superior to all the works of ascesis, saying: Fasting humbles the body, vigil purifies the intellect and stillness leads to the affliction that baptizes man anew and cleanses him of all sin.

We also owe to him the famous saying: Shed your blood and receive the Spirit." (Synaxarion)

Our Holy Mother Hilda, Abbess of Whitby (680)

A noble kinswoman of St Edwin, king of Northumbria (commemorated October 12), Hilda was baptized at a young age through the preaching of St Paulinus, one of the first missionaries sent from Rome to British Isles. At the age of thirty-three she renounced the world and entered monastic life. At first, she sought to enter a monastery near Paris in Gaul, but she was called back to her homeland by St Aidan, Bishop of Lindisfarne (August 31), who, discerning her already-apparent spiritual gifts, set her as Abbess of a small monastery. As her gifts of discernment and spiritual guidance became more widely-known, she led larger monasteries, finally establishing the Monastery of Whitby in 657. The Saint spent the next thirty-three years directing the Monastery, which became a beacon of Christian life throughout the British Isles and beyond. The Monastery was unusual by modern standards in that it comprised both a women's and a men's monastic house, with Mother Hilda as spiritual head of both. The community became a training-ground for priests and bishops who went on to spread the Gospel of Christ throughout Britain.

Commoners, kings and Bishop Aidan himself came regularly to her for spiritual counsel, and she was in her own lifetime regarded as the Mother of her country. For the last six years of her life she was afflicted with an unremitting burning fever, but she continued her holy work undeterred until her repose in 680. At the moment of her death, Saint Begu, in a different monastery, was awakened by a vision of Hilda's soul being borne up to heaven by a company of angels.

The Synaxarion concludes, "Saint Hilda, like her contemporaries Saint Etheldreda (23 June) and Saint Ebba (25 Aug.), belongs to that monastic company of women of royal birth who exercised a formative influence in the English Church of the seventh century, but she is also a rare example of a spiritual Mother, who received from God the gift of directing not only nuns but monks and bishops as well; for in the Lord Jesus there is neither male nor female, but a new creation (Gal. 3:28)."

Our Holy Father Nikon of Radonezh (1426)

He was born in 1350 in the town of Yuriev-in-the-fields, between Rostov and Radonezh. At a very young age he sought out St Sergius of Radonezh, seeking to be his disciple; but the Saint placed him in another monastery, where he soon became known as the 'lover of obedience' for his humility and selflessness. At last, when he was about thirty and had been ordained to the priesthood, he was able to go to Radonezh, where St Sergius, discerning his advanced spiritual state, made Nikon his cell-attendant. At the death of St Sergius, the brethren unanimously elected Nikon as their Abbot. In 1408, St Nikon was warned in an apparition that the monastery would be sacked by Tatars, so he and his monks fled with the monastery's books and sacred vessels. When they returned they found that the monastery had been burned to the ground. Setting to work immediately, they built a new monastery over

the next few years. In 1422 the relics of St Sergius, which had been miraculously preserved in the Tatar attack, were installed in the new monastery church.

The Synaxarion concludes: "Full of years and already transported in spirit to the Kingdom of Heaven, Saint Nikon said to his disciples, 'Take me from here to the bright church prepared for me by the prayers of my spiritual father. I do not want to stay any longer here below!' When he had communicated in the holy Mysteries and blessed his brethren one by one, he cried out, 'O my soul, draw near with joy to the place that has been prepared for thy rest. Draw near with joy because Christ is calling thee!' Then he fell asleep in peace. He was laid to rest opposite the tomb of Saint Sergius. Since then he has often appeared with Saint Sergius in order to heal the sick or to protect the Holy Trinity Lavra in times of danger."

Venerable Gennadius of Vatopedi
Righteous Mother Hilda of Whitby
Saint Lazarus the Iconographer and Confessor

Day 17-Nov-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 1 Thessalonians 5:9-13, 24-28; Luke 12:2-12
9 God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus
Christ 10 who died for us, so that whether we wake or sleep,c we should live
together with him.
11 Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up, which is what you
[already] do.
Life in the Church 12 Now, we beg you, brethren, to recognize those who work
hard among you, who are set over you in the Lord and who admonish you.
13 Respect and honor them in love because of their work.
Be at peace among yourselves.
24 He who calls you is faithful and he will carry this out.
25 Brethren, pray for us.
26 Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss.
27 I solemnly instruct you by the Lord that this letter should be read to all the holy
brethren.
28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you! Amen.
Gospel reading:

2 Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed; or hidden, that will not be known.
3 Therefore, whatever you have said in the darkness will be heard in the light.
What you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed on the
housetops.
4 I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that
can do no more.
5 But I will warn you whom you should fear: fear the one who after he has killed,
has [also] power to cast into Gehenna.
Yes, I tell you, fear him! 6 Are not five sparrows sold for two small coins? Yet not
one of them is forgotten by God.
7 Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered.
Therefore, do not be afraid! You are of more value than many sparrows.
8 I tell you, whoever confesses me before men, the Son of Man will also
acknowledge before the angels of God.
9 But whoever denies me in the presence of men will be denied in the presence of
the angels of God.
10 Everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but those
who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

11 When you are brought before the synagogues, rulers, and authorities, do not be
anxious about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say; 12 for the Holy
Spirit will teach you in that same hour what you must say.

Day 18-Nov-2023 Saturday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Holy Martyr Plato (266)

Plato was from the town of Ancyra in Galatia. He was a Christian by birth and upbringing. While in his youth, he showed great perfection in every virtue. Plato did not conceal his faith in Christ the Lord, but preached it openly, denouncing idolaters because of their worshiping lifeless objects in place of the Living Creator. For this, he was brought to trial before Governor Agrippinus, and was interrogated and harshly tortured by him. When the governor counseled him to avoid death and save his life by worshiping the idols, Plato said: 'There are two deaths, the one temporal and the other eternal; so also are there two lives, one of short duration and the other without end.' Then Agrippinus subjected him to even harsher tortures. Among other tortures, red-hot cannon balls were set on the saint's naked body; then they cut strips from his skin. 'Torture me more harshly,' the martyr cried out to the tortures, 'so that your inhumanity and my endurance may be seen more clearly.' When the torturer reminded the martyr that his namesake, Plato the philosopher, was a pagan, the martyr replied: 'I am not like Plato, nor is Plato like me except in name. I learn and teach the wisdom of Christ, but Plato was a teacher of wisdom that is foolishness to God.' After that, Plato was thrown into prison, where he remained for eighteen days without food and water. When the guards were amazed that Plato was able to live in hunger for so long, he told them: 'You are satisfied by meat, but I, by holy prayers. Wine gladdens you, but Christ the True Vine gladdens me.' Plato was beheaded in about the year 266 and received his wreath of eternal glory.

Source: St. Nikolai Velimirovic, The Prologue of Ohrid – Volume Two.

<u>Kontakion</u>

Thine all-holy memory doth cheer and gladden the whole world, calling all to come to thine august and ven'rable temple; wherein now, with jubilation we have all gathered, and with odes we hymn thy triumphs, O Martyr Plato, and

with faith, we cry out to thee: Rescue thy people, O Saint, from barbarous foes.

Holy Martyr Romanus and the holy child who declared for Christ (305)

"Saint Romanus was a deacon and exorcist in the Church of Caesarea in Palestine. He happened to be at Antioch in 303 when the Emperor Diocletian's edicts for the general persecution of Christians were published. He could not bear to see so many Christian men, women and children denying their faith in the true God for fear of suffering. As they went to sacrifice to the idols, he ran up, consumed with zeal for righteousness, crying shame on them with a loud voice. He was immediately arrested and brought before the city Prefect. He faced interrogation boldly and to prove the stupidity of the pagan cult, he asked for a child to be brought in, taken at random from the crowd in the public square. Romanus enquired of the lad whether it was more sensible to worship the one and only God and Creator of the world, or the many gods of the pagans. Showing himself wiser than the pagans, the child unhesitatingly decided for the God of the Christians. The Prefect flew into a rage at being made to look ridiculous and ordered the young confessor to be put to the torture straight away in the presence of his mother. The child endured the torments without flinching but told his mother he was thirsty and wanted a drink. '0 my dear son', the admirable woman answered, 'do not drink corruptible and temporal water, but keep up your courage so as to drink living and eternal water in the Kingdom of God!' The child was beheaded, and Saint Romanus was condemned to be burnt to death. He welcomed the sentence joyfully, and with a shining face was led unresistingly to the stake. Since the Emperor was in the city, the executioners awaited his decision before lighting the fire and the valiant Martyr exclaimed at the delay, 'Where is the fire that is prepared for me?' But the execution was stayed so that he could be brought before the Emperor in person. Aware that Christians rejoice over the death of a Martyr as the entrance to everlasting life, the tyrant wanted to increase the suffering of Christ's athlete by delaying the moment of deliverance. He ordered the executioners to tear out his tongue, which Romanus freely offered, and he miraculously went on praising God and encouraging the faithful after it was cut away. After this torment, he was imprisoned for a long time in chains until the Emperor's birthday. This was celebrated all over the Empire and a general release of prisoners was customary. But Romanus was not freed; with his feet crushed in the stocks, he was secretly strangled in his dungeon and thus received the adornment of martyrdom, as he had desired." (Synaxarion)

Holy New Martyr Anastasius of Epirus (1750), and Daniel, whom he converted

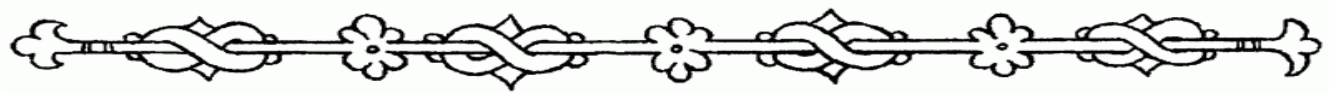
Anastasius and his sister were Greek peasants living in Epirus under Ottoman rule. One day a band of Turks came through their village, led by Musa, the son of the local Pasha (Governor). Musa was struck by the beauty of

Anastasius' sister and tried to seize her, but Anastasius threw himself at the Turks and fought them off long enough for his sister to escape. Musa's father had Anastasius arrested and brought before him and, impressed by his courage, attempted to convert him to Islam by many means: threats, beatings, and offers of worldly honor; but Anastasius held firm and was cast into prison.

Musa was moved by the way that Anastasius bore all these trials and temptations, and wanted to know more about the Faith that sustained him. Going secretly to Anastasius' prison cell, he peered in and saw two young men of shining appearance with the prisoner. They vanished as soon as Musa entered. Anastasius told Musa that these were angels who guard and aid every Christian, especially when they suffer for Christ. He also explained in a simple way the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which enables His followers to set little value upon worldly things. Musa, deeply moved, threw himself at Anastasius' feet and asked to become a Christian. Anastasius told him to wait until the proper time, because his conversion would cause his father to persecute all the Christians under his power. A few days later, in 1750, Anastasius was beheaded by order of the Pasha.

Soon after this, Musa visited the tomb of a holy Martyr and was granted a vision of Anastasius, who appeared to him encircled in light and urged him to continue on the road to Christ. Musa fled his father's domain to the Peleponnese where he received direction in the Faith from an aged ascetic. He then traveled to Venice to be baptized without fear of reprisal by the Turks. In time he became a monk on Corfu, receiving the monastic name of Daniel. He lived there in asceticism, but the desire grew in him to taste martyrdom for Christ, so he traveled to Constantinople to declare his conversion to the Muslims. But the Christians there dissuaded him, knowing that the conversion of such a prominent Turk would, if it were known, lead to retaliation against Christians. Saint Daniel returned to Corfu, where he founded a church in honor of St Anastasius and reposed in peace.

Holy Martyrs Zacchaeus and Alphaeus



Day 18-Nov-2023 Saturday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.
Readings of the day: 2 Corinthians 11:1-6; Luke 9:1-6
11 False apostles I wish that you would be patient with me in a little foolishness,
and indeed, you are! 2Certainly, I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy: I
betrothed you to one husband, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to
Christ.
3 But I am afraid that somehow, just as the serpent deceived Eve in his shrewd
deceit, your minds might likewise be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.
4 Somehow, if someone comes along preaching another Jesus, (not the one we
preached), or if you receive a different spirit, (not the one you [first] received), or a
different Good News, (which is not the one you accepted), you put up with it well
enough.
5 However, I do not consider myself inferior to the superlative apostles: 6 although
I am unskilled in speech, I am not unskilled in knowledge.
No, in every way, what we are has been revealed to you in all [these] things.

Gospel Reading:

Calling his twelve disciples together, Jesus gave them power and authority over all
demons, and [power] to cure diseases.
2 He then sent them forth to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick.
3 Jesus said to them, 'Do not take anything for the journey- no staff, no bag, no
bread, no money, no extra tunic.
4 Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave from that place.
5 Wherever people do not welcome you, shake the dust off your feet when you
leave their town, as a testimony against them.
6 They departed and went throughout the villages, preaching the Good News, and
healing everywhere.

Day 19-Nov-2023 Sunday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Holy Prophet Obadiah (Abdias)

Obadiah's is the shortest prophetic book in the Old Testament. The scriptures tell us little of where or when he lived. Some believe that he is the Obadiah who served as steward of King Ahab's household and, when Jezebel was killing the prophets, hid a hundred of them in a cave and fed them. It is said that this Obadiah later became a disciple of the Prophet Elijah (Elias). His name means "servant of God."

Our Holy Father Philaret, Metropolitan of Moscow (1867)

Born of a priestly family near Moscow in 1782, he entered seminary at a young age and soon distinguished himself for his piety and his scholarship of ancient languages. He was tonsured a monk, but was made a professor at the seminary in Moscow, where his expositions of the Faith, spoken and written, caused him to be regarded as a Father of the Church in his own time; many called him "the new Chrysostom."

In 1817, at the age of thirty-five, he was consecrated bishop, and in only a few years rose to the rank of Metropolitan of Moscow, the highest office in the Russian Church since Peter the Great abolished the Patriarchate. He remained Metropolitan for the rest of his life. Saint Philaret seemed literally tireless in his labors for the Church: no-one knew when he slept, and his servant, no matter when he came to the Metropolitan's quarters, would always find him working at his desk. He worked to restore moral standards among the clergy, which had fallen into laxity. Whenever he was forced to depose a cleric, he would secretly contribute to the family's needs out of his own resources. Similarly, he used up all of his financial resources in charitable works, always taking care that his donations were kept secret. He funded the building of a large hospice for orphans and children of poor clergy families.

St Philaret gave his full support to the fifty-year project of translating the Bible into Russian, and translated several Old Testament books himself, though the project was opposed by the Tsar and by some powerful groups in the Church. He supported the work of the fathers of Optina Monastery to publish translations of the Fathers of the Church; these translations, when they appeared, contributed to a great spiritual awakening in Russia.

He reposed in peace in 1867 at the age of eighty-five.

The well-loved "Morning Prayer of Philaret of Moscow" which begins "Lord, grant me to greet the coming day in peace..." was brought into Orthodox piety

by St Philaret but seems originally to have been written by Francois Fenelon, the French Quietist writer. The prayer also came to be used by the Optina Elders and is sometimes referred to as the "Morning Prayer of the Optina Elders." The prayer appears in several similar versions.

O Lord, grant me to greet the coming day in peace. Help me in all things to rely upon Your holy will. In every hour of the day reveal Your will to me. Bless my dealings with all who surround me. Teach me to treat all that comes to me throughout the day with peace of soul, and with the firm conviction that Your will governs all. In all my deeds and words guide my thoughts and feelings. In unforseen events let me not forget that all are sent by You. Teach me to act firmly and wisely, without embittering or embarrassing others. Give me strength to bear the fatigue of this coming day with all that it will bring. Direct my will, teach me to pray, pray You Yourself in me. Amen.

Holy Martyr Barlaam of Antioch (304)

Saint Barlaam was an old man, living in Antioch during the persecution of Diocletian and Maximian. When he confessed Christ before the Governor and refused to sacrifice to the idols, he was tortured for days: his flesh was torn by iron claws and he was stretched on the rack. When these conventional tortures failed, the Governor invented a new torment: Barlaam's hand was stretched over an altar to the idols, and a burning coal with incense was put in his palm. The torturers reasoned that when pain forced him to drop the coal, they would be able to say that he had offered sacrifice to the gods. But the holy Barlaam held his hand steady and watched calmly as his hand was burnt up by the coal. At last his hand fell to the ground and the Martyr gave up his soul to God.

In some accounts, St Barlaam survived his torments and reposed in peace. Some have held that he came from Cappadocia rather than Antioch, but this is probably incorrect. Saint John Chrysostom once delivered a homily at St Barlaam's tomb in Antioch on his feast day.

Our Holy Fathers Barlaam and Joasaph of India (4th c.)

"They were Indian ascetics. Joasaph was son and heir to King Abenner. By God's providence, he was visited by the elder Barlaam, who taught him the Christian faith and baptised him. After that, the elder went off into the mountains to live in asceticism, and Joasaph remained to wrestle with many temptations in the world and to overcome them by the grace of God. Joasaph finally succeeded in bringing his father to Christ. When he had been baptised, King Abenner lived a further four years in deep repentance (for he had committed grave sins in his persecution of Christians) and then finished his earthly course and went to the better life. The young Joasaph entrusted the kingdom to his friend Barachias, and himself went off into the desert to live in asceticism for the sake of Christ. His one desire on earth was to see his spiritual father, Barlaam, once more. God, in his mercy, fulfilled his desire, and, one day, Joasaph stood before Barlaam's cave, and called: 'Bless me,

Father!' The elder Barlaam lived in asceticism in the desert for seventy years, living a hundred years in all. St Joasaph handed over his kingdom at the age of twenty-five and went into the desert, where he lived a further thirty-five years. They both had great love for the Lord Jesus, brought many to the true Faith and entered into the eternal joy of their Lord." (Prologue)

They are commemorated on August 26 on the Greek calendar.

Holy Martyr Heliodorus

Day 19-Nov-2023 Sunday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Sunday The Rich Fool
Ephesians 5:9-19; Luke 12:16-21
9 for the fruit of the Spirit is in all [manner of] goodness, righteousness and truth.
10 Discern what is wellpleasing to the Lord! 11 Have no fellowship with the vaina works of darkness, but rather, expose them for what they are.
12 It is a shame even to speak about the things which these people do in secret!
13 But all things are revealed when they are exposed to the light.
14 Therefore, it is said: Awake, you sleeper, arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.
15 Therefore, watch carefully how you live, not as unwise, but as wise [people], 16 making good use of time, because the days are evil.
17 Do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.
18 Do not get drunk with wine – this is reckless living – but be filled with the Spirit.
19 Speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs! Sing and chant to the Lord in your heart;

Gospel Reading: The Rich Fool

16 Then Jesus told them a parable, saying, 'The ground of a certain rich man produced in abundance.
17 He thought to himself, 'What will I do? I do not have room to store my crops!' 18 Then the man said, 'This is what I will do: I will pull down my barns, build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.
19 Then I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods stored up for many years.
Take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry!" 20 But God said to him, 'You fool! Tonight your soul is demanded of you.
The things which you have prepared, to whom will they belong?' 21 This is how it

is when someone amasses treasure for himself but is not rich toward God.

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING
Blinded by His Grace one of the most important words for those of us who believe in Christ is the word grace.
Of course, the word God is the most important.
But if it were not for grace we would have no true contact with God; He would simply remain a distant and unapproachable deity.
At every Divine Liturgy the priest pronounces the blessing ‘the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ...be with you all’.
But what exactly is grace? This is a question that has troubled and puzzled many people throughout Christianity’s history.
A number of suggestions have been put forward by various Christian groups and theologians.
Orthodox theology helps us to understand just why grace is such an important word.
Let us not forget the much quoted saying of St Seraphim of Sarov that «the acquisition of grace is man’s most sublime goal in life».
According to the theology of our Church, the shortest yet fullest definition of grace is that it is God Himself! Yes, grace is nothing less than God Himself - in a form that man can commune with and partake in.
This is of fundamental importance.
If grace is not divine and uncreated (as God is) then there would be no means by which man can bridge the enormous gulf that separates him, as a finite and created being, with the infinite and uncreated being that God is.
And if man cannot have true communion with God in this life, then he has no real hope of having any communion with Him in the next either.
Many of the saints of our Church, as good ‘theological scientists’, dedicated their whole lives to understanding the working of God’s grace: how it is obtained, how it is lost, and how it is to be regained.
Our ascetical programme and the aim of our lives in the Church is precisely to learn this noble science.
In fact, everything we do in the Church has as its final goal the acquisition of grace.
As a loving Father, God offers His grace to all.
Many of the saints saw God’s grace even with their physical.
But how does the average Christian ‘see’ God’s grace? We see it in His providence for us.
We see it in the outpouring of His love on the Cross, which is the same love that led Him to create us in the first place.
But we also see grace-driven providence in our personal lives when we discern how God intervenes, always respectfully, in our own lives to call us back to Himself.

The eyes of our soul are then opened to see and recognise His grace, His love, and His exact and caring providence for each and every one of us.
All individuals are, therefore, either blinded (i.e. awe-struck, captivated and not darkened) by God's grace or blind to it.
It all depends on our own free disposition and wills.
The saints would often pray 'O Lord, enlighten my darkness'.
We, too, could make this our prayer.
'O Lord, enlighten my darkened mind and heart that I may see Your mighty works and behold Your grace and Your love for me and for all mankind'.
However, we must first convince God of our fidelity to Him by entrusting to Him our whole lives.
As the saying goes, he who leaves everything in God's hands sees God's hand in everything.

Day 20-Nov-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Forefeast of the Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple.
Our Holy Father Gregory of Decapolis (842)

He was born in Irenopolis, one of the "Ten Cities" of Asia Minor. Though his parents wanted him to marry, he entered monastic life as a young man, and struggled for many years, living in reclusion under the guidance of a wise spiritual father. One day, while in prayer, he was carried away to Paradise and experienced the blessedness that the redeemed will know at the general Resurrection. The vision seemed to him only to last for an hour, but he learned from his disciple that he had been in ecstasy for four days.

Aware that the Enemy can appear as an angel of light, and that we should be suspicious of seeming revelations, he sought the counsel of his Abbot, who reassured him, and told him to give thanks to God by continuing in his ascetic labors.

Soon, he was told by revelation that he was to go forth into the world, living without an earthly home, to uphold the Orthodox faith, which was then under attack by the Iconoclasts. He traveled through Ephesus, Constantinople, Corinth, Rome, Sicily, Thessalonica, and Constantinople again, laboring in defense of the Faith and working many miracles. Usually he would stay with poor people who welcomed him into their houses, though it was forbidden by law to receive an Orthodox monk (that is, one who defended the Icons). In his last few years, afflicted by illness, he settled in Constantinople, where he reposed in peace in 832, just before the end of iconoclasm and the restoration of Orthodoxy. Since 1490, his incorrupt relics have dwelt at the Monastery of Bistritsa in Romania, where they continue to be a source of miracles for the many pilgrims who come to venerate them.

Our Holy Father Proclus, Archbishop of Constantinople (447)

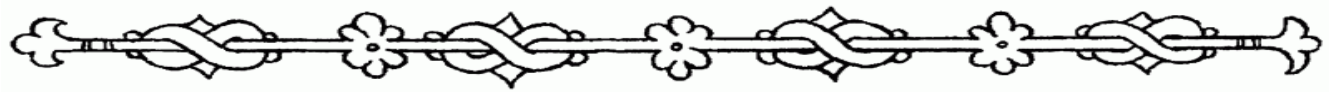
He was a disciple and scribe of St John Chrysostom. About the year 426 he was ordained Bishop of Cyzicus, but was unable to take up his see because another had been unlawfully elected in his place, so he remained in Constantinople. Around 428, Nestorius was made Patriarch of Constantinople,

and almost immediately began teaching his blasphemous doctrine that the holy Virgin could not be called Theotokos, "God-bearer," but only Christotokos, "Christ-bearer." Proclus resisted this teaching forcefully, once giving a sermon in the presence of the heretical Patriarch, defending the Orthodox teaching concerning the Theotokos. Proclus was elevated to the throne of Patriarch of Constantinople in 434, after Nestorius had been deposed and the Orthodox teaching clearly proclaimed in an Ecumenical Council. It was Proclus who persuaded the Emperor Theodosius the Younger to have the holy relics of his teacher St John Chrysostom returned to Constantinople, and who received them on their triumphal return to the city. He reposed in peace in 447.

Holy Martyrs Eustathius, Thespesius and Anatolius

Saint Isaac, Archbishop of Armenia

Venerable Sozomen of Cyprus



Day 20-Nov-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 2 Thessalonians 1:1-10; Luke 12:13-15, 22-31
1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy: to the Church of the Thessalonians in God our Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ.
2Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
3We are bound to always give thanks to God for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith is growing wonderfully and your mutual love for all is overflowing.
4Therefore, in the Churches of God, we boast about you for your patience, faith in all your persecutions and for the afflictions which you endure.
5This is an obvious sign of the righteous judgment of God, so that you may be accounted worthy of the Kingdom of God, for which you too suffer.
6 It is righteous for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you 7 and to give relief to you who are afflicted with us.
This will be when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, 8 bringing vengeance to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus.
9 They will pay the penalty of eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his power, 10 when he comes to be glorified in his holy ones and to be admired among all those who have believed (because our testimony to you was believed) in that Day.

Gospel reading:
13 Someone from the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, tell my brother to share the inheritance with me!' 14 But Jesus replied, 'Friend,a who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?' 15 He said to them, 'Beware! Keep yourselves from covetousness, for a person's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.
22 Jesus said to his disciples, 'Therefore, I tell you not to be anxious about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear.
23 Life is more than food and the body is more than clothing! 24 Consider the ravens: they do not sow, they do not reap, they do not have a warehouse or barn, and [yet] God feeds them.
And how much more valuable you are than birds! 25 Which one of you by worrying can add a single day to his life?d 26 If you are not able to accomplish even the smallest things, why then are you anxious about the rest? 27 Consider the lilies,

how they grow.
They do not toil or spin; yet, I tell you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.
28 But if this is how God clothes the grass in the field, which today exists and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, you of little faith? 29 Do not set your hearts on what you will eat or drink; do not be apprehensive.
30 It is the pagan world that runs after all these things, and your Father understands that you need them.
31 Seek rather the Kingdom of God and all these things will be added to you.

Day 21-Nov-2023 Tuesday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

The Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple in Jerusalem.

Epistle Reading: St. Paul's Letter to the Hebrews 9:1-7

BRETHREN, the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly sanctuary. For a tent was prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence; it is called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain stood a tent called the Holy of Holies, having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, which contained a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail. These preparations having thus been made, the priests go continually into the outer tent, performing their ritual duties; but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood which he offers for himself and for the errors of the people.

Gospel Reading: Luke 10:38-42, 11:27-28

At that time, Jesus entered a village; and a woman called Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving; and she went to him and said, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve you alone? Tell her then to help me.' But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her.' As he said this, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, 'Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked!' But he said, 'Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!'

When the holy and most pure child Mary (Mariam or Miriam in Hebrew) reached the age of three, her parents, the righteous Joachim and Anna,

fulfilled the vow they had made to dedicate her to God. Going in procession with a company of maidens carrying torches, they presented their child at the Temple in Jerusalem, where Zecharias the High Priest took her under his care, blessing her with these words: "The Lord has glorified thy name in every generation; it is in thee that He will reveal the Redemption that he has prepared for his people in the last days." He then brought the child into the Holy of Holies — something completely unheard-of, for under the Law only the High Priest was allowed to enter the Holy Place, and he only once a year on the Day of Atonement.

(In the icon of the feast, the maidens who accompany the Theotokos are shown bare-headed, as was customary for unmarried girls; but the Theotokos herself, though only three years old, wears the head-covering of a married woman to show her consecration to God.)

The holy Virgin lived in the Temple for the next nine years, devoting herself entirely to prayer. In this time she attained the utter purity of heart befitting the destined Bearer of the Most High; she became in her own person the fulfilment and condensation of all of Israel's faithfulness. Saint Gregory Palamas says that, when the Theotokos entered the Holy of Holies, the time of preparation and testing of the Old Covenant came to an end for Israel, which was now ready, in the blessed Virgin, to bring forth the Savior.

When Mary approached marriageable age, she was entrusted to the chaste widower Joseph to guard her. (The Prologue says that a life of intentional virginity was unknown among the Hebrews, so the righteous Joseph undertook the forms of marriage so as not to cause scandal among the people.)

"Wherefore the Church rejoices and exhorts all the friends of God for their part to enter into the temple of their heart, there to make ready for the coming of the Lord by silence and prayer, withdrawing from the pleasures and cares of this world." (Synaxarion)

Day 21-Nov-2023 Tuesday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.
Readings of the day: 2 Thessalonians 1:10-2:2; Luke 12:42-48
9 They will pay the penalty of eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and
from the glory of his power, 10 when he comes to be glorified in his holy ones and
to be admired among all those who have believed (because our testimony to you
was believed) in that Day.
11 With this in mind, we also pray always for you, so that our God may account
you worthy of your calling and fulfil with power [your] every desire of goodness and
work of faith.
12 May the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ be glorified in you, and you in him,
according to the grace of our God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.
2 A Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our
gathering to him, we ask you 2not to be quickly shaken in your mind.
Do not be troubled by a prophecy, report or letter allegedly from us, saying that the
day of Christ has come.

Gospel Reading:
42 The Lord replied, 'Who, then, is the faithful and wise steward whom his master
will set over his household to give [his people] their allowance of food at the proper
time? 43 Blessed is that servant whom his lord will find doing so when he returns.
44 Truly I tell you, he will set this servant over all that he has.
45 But what if the servant says in his heart, 'My lord is late in returning' and begins
to beat his fellow-servants, both men and women, and also to eat, drink and
become drunk? 46 Then the lord of that servant will come in a day when he is not
expecting him, and in an hour that he does not know.
He will cut the servant in two and assign him a place with the unbelievers.
47 Such a servant, who knew his lord's will and yet did not prepare or do what the
master wanted will be beaten with many stripes.
48 But a servant who did not know and did things worthy of punishment will be
beaten with few stripes.
From everyone to whom much is given, much will be required; and from whoever
was entrusted with much, much will be asked.

Day 22-Nov-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Apostle Philemon and Sts Apphia, Archippus and Onesimus

Philemon is addressed in the Epistle of the holy Apostle Paul that bears his name. He was a nobleman from Colossae; Apphia was his wife. Archippus was Bishop of Colossae. All three were disciples of the Apostle Paul. Onesimus was a pagan slave of Philemon, who stole from his master and fled to Rome. There St Paul led him to faith in Christ, and wrote the Epistle to Philemon, urging Onesimus' master to forgive him and take him back as a brother in Christ. This Philemon did, and Onesimus later became a bishop. In Greece he is venerated as the patron Saint of the imprisoned. All of these holy followers of Christ died as martyrs, stoned to death by pagans.

Holy Martyrs Cecilia, Valerian, Tiburtius and Maximus, at Rome (3rd c.)

Saint Cecilia was born to a prominent pagan family in Rome. In her youth she secretly became a disciple of Christ. When her parents betrothed her to a young man named Valerian, she brought him to faith in Christ and persuaded him that they should live in virginity. Valerian was baptised by Pope Urban, and in his turn went on to bring his brother Tiburtius to the Faith.

At the time, Christians in Rome were being violently persecuted, many to the point of martyrdom; Cecilia, her husband, and his brother made it their work to go out by night and secretly give pious burial to the martyrs and give charitable help to their families. Eventually, this was discovered, and the two brothers were in their own turn arrested and condemned as Christians. At the moment of their beheading, the Roman officer Maximus saw heaven open and angels come to receive their souls; he, along with several other onlookers, confessed Christ, and in his turn died under torture. Finally, Cecilia herself was arrested and, after faithfully enduring various tortures, was beheaded.

Because St Cecilia is described in her first biography as a lover of music, she is honored as patroness of church music in the West, and is often shown playing the organ.

Holy Prince and Passion-Bearer Peter Yaropolk (1086)

"Saint Peter Yaropolk, the son of Grand Prince Iziaslav Yaroslavovich, took part in all his father's campaigns as an obedient son, and went with him into exile. The meek and humble Prince had much to suffer from the members of his family, but he always forgave them. Every day he earnestly prayed to be counted worthy of holy death, like Saints Boris and Gleb (24 July), in order to be cleansed of his many sins by the shedding of his blood and to be freed from the vanity of this world. He was assasinated on 21 November 1086."

(Synaxarion)

The term 'Passion-bearer' is used in the Russian Church for Saints who, though they were not killed for their faith and are thus not strictly Martyrs, suffered death with resignation and in the spirit of the Gospel. Saints Boris and Gleb are the first and model Passion-bearers.

Holy Grand Prince and Martyr Michael of Tver (1318)

He was born in Tver in 1272 to Prince Yaroslav Yaroslavovich, who was the brother of St Alexander Nevsky (November 23). Michael was brought up in the faith by his mother, who later became a nun. Such was his fervor that from childhood he was certain that he must end his life either as a monk or a martyr. He succeeded his brother as Prince of Tver in 1285, and later became Grand Prince of Vladimir, the Russian capital during the Mongol conquest.

When Prince Michael lost the throne of Vladimir through the plotting of his kinsman Prince George, his advisers urged him to go to war against George; but he preferred to lose power rather than to subject his people to bloodshed. When George attacked Tver itself, Michael took up arms to defend it, and was victorious. One of his prisoners was Princess Agatha, George's wife and the sister of the Tatar Khan. When she died in captivity, the full wrath of both George and the Tatars was aroused against Michael. The Prince knew that the only way to avert catastrophe for his people was to go to the Golden Horde to be judged at the Khan's court. Michael's kinsmen and advisors knew that such a course would surely lead to his death, but none were able to dissuade him from going to save his people.

Michael was kept prisoner with a wooden yoke around his neck, and subjected to many humiliations by the Tatars. But as he awaited his sentence he remained calm, spending his days in chanting the Church services and the Psalms. On the night of 21-22 November he had a revelation of his impending death. He attended the Liturgy, took Communion, and embraced his family. Then, opening the Psalter, he read the words Cast thy burden on the Lord, and He will sustain thee: He will never permit the righteous to be moved (Ps 54). He then calmly greeted his kinsman George and his minions, who pounced on the Prince and ran him through with swords. Prince Michael's relics were returned to Moscow, then translated to Tver in 1320. When the city was besieged in 1549, St Michael appeared to the inhabitants in the form of a mounted knight, armed for battle.

Saint Callistus (Xanthopoulos), Patriarch of Constantinople

Holy Martyr Menignus the Fuller

Holy Righteous Michael the Soldier

Day 22-Nov-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; Luke 12:48-59
2 Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering to him, we ask you 2not to be quickly shaken in your mind.
Do not be troubled by a prophecy, report or letter allegedly from us, saying that the day of Christ has come.
3 Let no one deceive you in any way! This will not take place unless the apostasy comes first and the man of sin is revealed, the son of destruction.
4 He opposes and exalts himself over all that is called God or that is an object of religion to take his seat as God in the sanctuary of God, presenting himself as a god! 5 Do you not remember that, when I was still with you, I told you these things?
6 Now, you know what is restraining him, so that he may be revealed in his own time.
7 The mystery of lawlessness is already at work!d But now, there is one who restrains, until he is taken out of the way.
8 Then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will kill with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the manifestation of his coming.
9 The coming [of the lawless one] is according to Satan's operation with all kinds of power, miracles and lying wonders,
10 and with all deception of wickedness aimed at those who are being lost, because they did not receive the love of the truth so that they might be saved.
11 Because of this, God sends them a strong delusion so that they should believe a lie
12 and those who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness shall all be judged.

Gospel Reading:
48 But a servant who did not know and did things worthy of punishment will be beaten with few stripes.
From everyone to whom much is given, much will be required; and from whoever was entrusted with much, much will be asked.
49 I have come to bring fire upon the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already!
50 But now, I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished!
51 Do you think that I have come to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather

division.
52 For from now on, there will be five in a divided house, three against two, and two against three.
53 They will be divided, father against son, son against father; mother against daughter, and daughter against her mother; mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law, and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.
54 Jesus also said to the multitudes, 'When you see a cloud rising from the west, you immediately say, 'A shower is coming, and so it happens.
55 When a south wind blows, you say, 'There will be a scorching heat, and it happens.
56 You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and sky, but how is it that you do not interpret this [present] time?
57 Why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?
58 For when you are going with your adversary before the magistrate, as you are on the way, do your utmost to be released from him, for fear that perhaps he will drag you to the judge, and the judge might deliver you to the officer, and the officer might throw you into prison.
59 I tell you, you will by no means get out of there, until you have paid the very last penny.

Day 23-Nov-2023 Thursday

Fast Day/ oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

St Alexander Nevsky (1263)

"Nevsky" means "of the Neva (River)." This holy prince guided Russia through one of the most fragile and difficult periods of its history. Most of the nation was crushed beneath the 200-year domination of the Tatars, who burned Kiev and established their central territory (known as the Golden Horde) there. At the same time, Teutonic and Swedish Christian invaders sought to conquer from the West, and Pope Innocent IV of Rome was seeking, by conversion or conquest, to pervert the Orthodox faith of the Russian people. At the same time, constant warfare among petty Russian lords made unified work on behalf of the people almost impossible. In this harsh climate, Prince Alexander of Novgorod shone as that rare thing: a truly Christian ruler. In time of famine he opened his treasury to all who were in need. Several times he traveled to the Golden Horde, and even to Mongolia, to plead on behalf of his people for relief from Tatar taxation and oppression.

Soon after he became prince of Novgorod in 1236, his kingdom was attacked by the forces of Sweden and Lithuania along with the Teutonic Knights, a semi-monastic military order pledged to force the Slavic and Baltic peoples to accept Roman Catholicism. In 1240, the night before his small army was to face the much more powerful invaders, Saint Alexander was granted a vision: Saints Boris and Gleb appeared in a boat on the Neva River, urging angelic oarsmen to hurry to the aid of "Alexander their kinsman." Encouraged, Alexander and his small force crushed their adversaries in battle.

When he was summoned for the first time to pay homage to the Khan, he went as if to his own death, for the Khan required his subjects to submit to pagan rites or die, and the prince knew that he would never betray the Faith of Christ. Before the Khan, he said "My liege, I do homage in that God has granted you sovereignty, but I am unable to worship idols because I am a Christian and adore the one and only God in three Persons, the Maker of heaven and earth." The Khan, knowing of his valor and impressed by his integrity, received him as an honored guest.

In another visit to the Golden Horde, the prince averted a Tatar invasion in retribution for an uprising by another prince, dug deeply into his treasury to ransom prisoners, and was given rule over all of Russia.

Threats from the West continued. Prince Alexander firmly opposed the missionaries sent into his realms by Pope Innocent IV of Rome; in response the Pope launched what the Synaxarion calls a "veritable Crusade" against

the Prince. In 1256 an alliance of Swedes, Danes, Finns and Teutonic Knights attempted to take Novgorod, but were again repulsed by Alexander, who for a time occupied Finland.

In 1260, the holy Prince made a final journey to appeal to the Tatars, who had increased the tribute levied on the Russian people, and were carrying those unable to pay into slavery. Having obtained a reduction of tribute and relief for his people, he headed home but, on the journey home, exhausted and ill from his labors, he gave up his soul to God in 1263, having served his people without rest until the end. On his deathbed he received the monastic Great Schema and the new name Alexis.

"Many miracles and apparitions have taken place at his tomb, especially on the eves of the great Russian victories over the Tatars in 1380, 1552 and 1572. The sanctity of the holy Prince was formally recognized by the Church in 1380, when his incorrupt relics were uncovered. In the eighteenth century, Peter the Great proclaimed Saint Alexander Nevsky Protector of the Russian people." (Synaxarion)

Our Holy Father Amphilocus, Bishop of Iconium (395)

"A fellow-countryman and friend of St Basil the Great and other great saints of the fourth century, Amphilochius early forsook the bustle of the world and withdrew to a cave where, as a solitary, he lived in asceticism for forty years. The episcopal throne in Iconium then fell empty, and Amphilochius was chosen in a wonderful way and consecrated as Bishop of Iconium. He was a marvellous shepherd and a great defender of the purity of the Orthodox faith, and took part in the Second Ecumenical Council in 381. He fought zealously against Macedonius, and against the Arians and the Eunomians. He personally begged Theodosius the Great to drive the Arians out of every city in the Empire, but the Emperor did not comply with his request. After a few days, Amphilochius came before the Emperor again. When the bishop was taken into the presence-chamber, the Emperor was sitting on his throne with his son Arcadius, whom he had taken as co-Emperor, sitting at his right hand. Entering the room, Amphilochius did reverence to Theodosius, but ignored Arcadius as though he were not there. Infuriated by this, the Emperor Theodosius commanded that Amphilochius be instantly driven from court. The saint then said to the Emperor: 'Do you see, 0 Emperor, how you do not tolerate a slight paid to your son? In the same way, God the Father does not tolerate dishonour paid to His Son, turning with loathing from those who blaspheme against Him, and being angered at that accursed Arian heresy.' Hearing this, the Emperor understood the reason for Amphilochius's seeming disrespect towards his son, and marvelled at his wisdom and daring. Among many other works, Amphilochius wrote several books on the Faith. He entered into rest in 395 in great old age, and went to immortal life." (Prologue)

Saint Amphilocus was a kinsman of St Gregory the Theologian: his father's sister Nonna (August 5) was St Gregory's mother. Amphilocus himself was a

lifelong friend of all three of the great Cappadocian Fathers: Sts Basil, Gregory the Theologian and Gregory of Nyssa.

St Columban, Abbot of Luxeuil (615)

Born in Ireland around 540, he joined the great monastic movement that flowered in Ireland following the missionary work of St Patrick and his disciples. After spending some years in Irish monasteries, he made pilgrimage to Gaul with twelve other monks, planning to preach the Gospel wherever they were led. The king of Burgundy, learning of their holiness, gave them land, where in time three large monasteries were founded with St Columban as their spiritual Father. Here the Saint established the rule that became normal for many monasteries in the West: in addition to its severe penitential disciplines, it included provision for some monks to be in prayer at every hour of the day and night — laus perennis (unceasing praise), as it was called. (This practice was also adopted by the Monastery of the Unsleeping Ones (Akoimetoi) in Constantinople). Eventually, political strife in Gaul led to the expulsion of the Irish monks, and Columban made his way to Italy through Germany, proclaiming the Gospel, instructing his spiritual children by letter, and battling against Arianism, which flourished throughout the Germanic lands. He settled in a monastery in the Appenines, where he reposed in peace in 615.

Saint Gregory, Bishop of Agrigentum

Saint Ischyrion, Bishop of Egypt

Saint Mitrophan, Bishop of Voronezh

Day 23-Nov-2023 Thursday

Fast Day/ oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.
Readings of the day: 2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5; Luke 13:1-9
13 Nevertheless, we must always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning for salvation through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.
14 Indeed, he called you through our Good News to obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.
15 And so, brethren, stand firm and keep the traditions which we taught you, whether by word or by letter.
16 May our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal consolation and good hope through grace, 17 comfort your hearts and establish you in every good work and word.
3 Request for prayers – Against those who refuse to work As for other matters, brethren, pray for us, so that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it is with you.
2 Pray also that we may be delivered from unreasonable and evil men, for not all have faith.
3 Still, the Lord is faithful; he will establish you and guard you from the evil one.
4 We have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you accomplish and will continue to accomplish the things which we command.
5 May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the endurance of Christ.

Gospel Reading:

1 At that time, some [Jews] were present who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.
2 Jesus answered, 'Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered such things? 3I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all perish in the same way! 4 Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell.
Do you think that they were worse offenders than all those who live in Jerusalem?
5 I tell you, no, but, unless you repent, you will all perish as they did!'
6 He then said this parable.
'A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard.

He came to look for fruit on it, but found nothing.
7 He said to the vine dresser, 'Behold, I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree for three years, and found none.
Cut it down! Why does it waste the soil?' 8 The gardener answered, 'Lord, let it be for this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it.
9 If it bears fruit, fine; but if not, after that, you can cut it down.
'

Day 24-Nov-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Hieromartyr Clement, Bishop of Rome (~100)

He was instructed in the Faith of Christ by St Peter himself, and may be the Clement mentioned by the Apostle Paul as a fellow-worker in Philippians 4:3. He was consecrated Bishop of Rome about the year 91; some traditions call him the first Bishop of Rome, others the third after Sts Linus and Anacletus. (This is not necessarily inconsistent: in the Apostolic age, the offices of Elder and Bishop were not strictly distinguished, and the three bishops may have served at the same time or by turns.) He is the author of the Epistle of Clement, which was so highly esteemed in the early Church that it is often found in early versions of the New Testament. The holy Bishop effected countless conversions in Rome, even bringing the Prefect Sisinius and his wife Theodora to the Faith after miraculously healing them of blindness. The bishop's success so angered the Emperor Trajan that he had Clement exiled to the Crimea, on the far eastern frontier of the Empire. There the holy bishop continued to work wonders of evangelism, founding seventy-five churches in one year and bringing countless pagans to faith in Christ. Finally, to put a stop to the Saint's work, the Governor of the region had him cruelly tortured, then thrown into the Black Sea with an anchor around his neck.

More than 700 years later, in 860, St Cyril (commemorated May 11) arrived in the Crimea, sent by St Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople. He found the relics of St Clement faithfully preserved there and brought part of them back to Constantinople.

Holy Hieromartyr Peter of Alexandria (312)

Saint Peter was Bishop of Alexandria for twelve years. It was he who excommunicated Arius. When some of Arius' followers appealed to the Bishop to restore Arius to the communion of the Church, they were surprised by the bishop's vehement refusal, for the heretic had not yet clearly and publicly made known his blasphemous teaching that the Son is a creation of the Father. The holy bishop then revealed to these followers a vision he had seen, in which Christ appeared to him as a child wearing a garment torn in half from head to foot. When St Peter asked the Lord who had rent His garment, he

said that it was Arius, who must not be received back into communion.

The holy bishop was beheaded during the reign of Maximinus. He is called the "Seal of the Martyrs" because he was the last Bishop of Alexandria to suffer martyrdom under the pagan Emperors.

Holy Martyr Mercurius of Smolensk (1238)

He was a soldier from Byzantium, one of the defenders of Smolensk when it was besieged by the Tatars in 1238. One day the Mother of God appeared to Mercurius and told him that the Tatars were preparing a surprise attack — and, further, that he must take up arms and attack the enemy singlehandedly. Placing all his trust in God, the lone soldier threw himself against the Tatar host crying 'Most Holy Mother of God, help me!' He was quickly surrounded and cut down, and it appeared that his action had been as foolhardy as it had seemed, when a woman at the head of a glorious host, all of them surrounded by light, appeared and threw back the Tatar army. The next morning the people of Smolensk found the ground covered with the bodies of their enemies. They buried Mercurius in the Cathedral, where he has been venerated as a Martyr ever since.

Day 24-Nov-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 2 Thessalonians 3:6-18; Luke 13:31-35
6 Now we command you, brethren, in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to withdraw yourselves from every brother [or sister] who walks in rebellion, and not after the tradition which they received from us.
7 You know how you should imitate us: we did not behave as rebels among you 8 and we did not eat bread from anyone's hand without paying for it.
We were in labor and hardship, working night and day, so that we might not burden any of you.
9 It is not because we do not have this right, but we wanted to be an example to you so that you might imitate us.
10 For even when we were with you, we gave you this instruction: 'Anyone who will not work should not eat either.
11 Yet, we hear about some among you who live in rebellion, not working at all but interfering with other people's lives.
12 In the Lord Jesus Christ, we command and exhort those who live this way to work quietly and to eat their own bread.
13 But you, brethren, do not grow tired of doing what is good.
14 Take note of those who do not obey our word in this letter: suspend your fellowship [with them] to bring them to shame.
15 Do not consider such a person as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.
16 Now, may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. May the Lord be with you all! 17 This is my greeting, Paul, with my own hand! This is the sign {of authenticity} in every letter: this is my handwriting.
18 May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all! Amen.
Gospel reading:

31 On that same day, some Pharisees came and said to Jesus,c 'Leave this place and go somewhere else, for Herod wants to kill you!' 32 Jesus replied, 'Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I fulfil my end.
33 Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the next day, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem.
34 Jerusalem, Jerusalem, [you] that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often have I longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! 35 Behold, your

house is left to you desolate! I tell you, you will not see me, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the Name of the Lord!"

Day 25-Nov-2023 Saturday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Leavetaking of the Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple
† Holy Great Martyr and Most Wise Catherine of Alexandria and those with her (305)

"Saint Catherine, who was from Alexandria, was the daughter of Constas (or Cestus). She was an exceedingly beautiful maiden, most chaste, and illustrious in wealth, lineage, and learning. By her steadfast understanding, she utterly vanquished the passionate and unbridled soul of Maximinus, the tyrant of Alexandria; and by her eloquence, she stopped the mouths of the so-called philosophers who had been gathered to dispute with her. She was crowned with the crown of martyrdom in the year 305. Her holy relics were taken by Angels to the holy mountain of Sinai, where they were discovered many years later; the famous monastery of Saint Catherine was originally dedicated to the Holy Transfiguration of the Lord and the Burning Bush, but later was dedicated to Saint Catherine." (Great Horologion)

So great was St Catherine's eloquence that the fifty orators assigned to debate her recognized their error and, as a body, asked for baptism, for which Maximinus condemned them all to death. The Saint was then subjected to torture on a specially-constructed spiked wheel (with which she is usually shown in her icon), but an angel loosed her and miraculously smashed the wheel. Maximinus' own wife and 200 soldiers, seeing her sufferings and the nobility with which she bore them, were moved to profess their faith in Christ and their yearning to be baptized. All of them were put to death. Finally Catherine herself was led outside the walls of Alexandria and, after a prayer of thanksgiving to God, was beheaded.

Troparion — Tone 4

By your virtues as by rays of the sun you enlightened the unbelieving philosophers, / and like the most bright moon you drove away the darkness of disbelief from those walking in the night; / you convinced the queen, and also

chastised the tyrant, / God-summoned bride, blessed Catherine. / You hastened with desire to the heavenly bridal chamber of the fairest Bride-groom Christ, / and you were crowned by Him with a royal crown; / standing before Him with the angels, pray for us who keep your most sacred memory.

Kontakion — Tone 2
Let all of us who love to honor the martyrs / form a great choir in praise of the most wise Catherine, / for she preached Christ and trampled the serpent, / despising the knowledge of the orators!

Great Martyr Mercurius (~259)

He was born in the province of Asia, to a Scythian who had secretly converted to Christianity. Like his parents, he was a secret follower of Christ, serving as a legionary in the Roman army during the reign of the Emperor Decius. During a campaign, an Angel appeared to him, gave him a sword and told him to go into battle trusting in Christ's help. Mercurius plunged into battle, fought his way alone through the enemy lines, and reached the barbarian commander Rigas, whom he killed. Upon the death of their chief the barbarians scattered and the victory was won.

The Emperor, hearing of the young soldier's exploits, promoted him to a position at court. There, lulled by the pleasures and honors of the court, Mercurius forgot his duties to Christ his King. One night the same Angel who had given him the sword appeared to him once again and reminded him of the sword that Christ had given him, an emblem of the battle of martyrdom that he was about to enter. The next day Mercurius, now returned to his senses, refused to offer sacrifice to the gods. When called before the Emperor, he boldly proclaimed Christ and threw off his badges of office. He was thrown in prison and subjected to cruel tortures, all of which he bore with peace and joy, encouraged by the Angel who appeared to him again to offer comfort and encouragement. After long torment he was beheaded in Caesarea in Cappadocia, at the age of twenty-five.

Venerable Peter the Hesychast

Day 25-Nov-2023 Saturday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.
Readings of the day: Galatians 1:3-10; Luke 9:37-43
3 Grace to you and peace from God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave himself for our sins, so that he might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father- 5 to whom be the glory unto ages of ages! Amen.
A different 'Good News' 6 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ in order to embrace a different 'Good News'- 7 and there is no other 'Good News!' Yet, there are some who disturb you and want to pervert the Good News of Christ.
8 Now, even if ourselves or an angel from heaven should preach to you any 'Good News' that is not what we preached to you, let such a one be accursed!a 9 We have said it before and now I say it again: if anyone preaches to you any other 'Good News' than what you received, let such a one be accursed! 10 I am now seeking to please God or people? I am striving to please human beings? But if I was still trying to please men, then I would not be a servant of Christ!

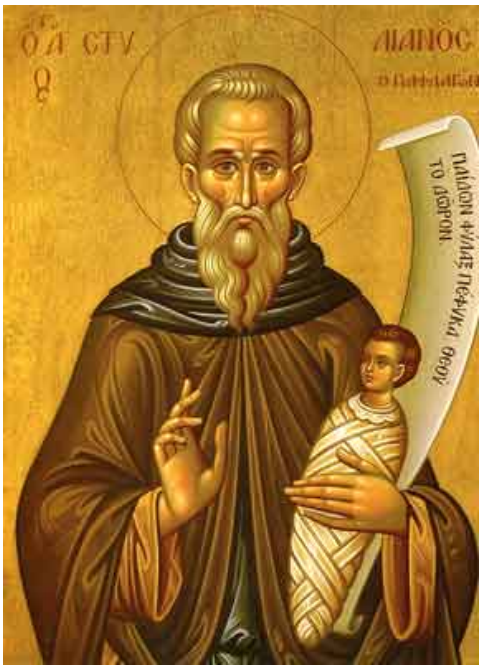
Gospel Reading:

37 On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great multitude met him.
38 A man from the crowd called out, saying, 'Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child.
39 Behold, when a spirit seizes him, he suddenly cries out and it convulses him so that he foams [at the mouth].
It scarcely ever leaves him and is breaking him.
40 I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.
41 Jesus answered, 'Faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here.
42 While the boy was still coming, the demon threw him down and convulsed him violently.
But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father.
43 And all were astonished at the majesty of God.
The Lord announces his passion While all were marveling at all that Jesus did, he said to his disciples,

Day 26-Nov-2023 Sunday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

St Stylianos the Hermit



St Stylianos was a man who practiced every day of his lifetime what Jesus preached when he said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the Kingdom of God" (Luke 10:14).

His great concern for children was such that he came to be considered the patron saint of children, but he did not limit his benevolence to children alone, as his life story bears out.

Stylianos was born during the seventh century in Adrianopolis in the province of Paphlagonia into a family which for generations had known nothing but poverty, a circumstance which was accepted without complaint and in which the simple, uncomplicated life afforded them greater time for religious matters. What the family of Stylianos lacked in material things was more than offset by the wealth of a deep faith in Jesus Christ and a cheerful commitment to the Messiah who never owned anything more than the clothes he wore. Stylianos was early made aware of this affinity with the Lord and by the time he had reached maturity had acquired a profound sense of responsibility to the Savior. Determined to serve Jesus Christ to the fullest of his ability, Stylianos joined the hermits of the desert with a view toward cleansing his soul through a period of meditation and prayer, as well as through association with men likewise pledging their lives to Jesus Christ.

Unlike most other hermits, however, he did not withdraw from society altogether, preferring to go among the people for whatever good he might do, and then returning to his little cave for rest and prayerful meditation. One night while he prayed for guidance in helping others, Stylianos felt a divine presence and was consumed by the great glory of the Holy Spirit, emerging from his cave the next day with a spirit of exultation and serenity he had never known before.

In his customary rounds, wherein he counseled and comforted, he felt compelled to place his hand on a stricken child, something he had not up to that time dared to do; he felt the power of the Lord being transferred to the

ailing youngster through his extended arm. The child immediately recovered, and thenceforth St Stylianos was sought after by every suffering soul for miles around, young and old. His cave became a magnet for the sick and suffering, many of whom received complete cures not only through the power in this man but through their faith as well, without which a sufferer's case was hopeless.

It was this time that St Stylianos concerned himself primarily with children, not just the physically afflicted but also those who were in need of spiritual guidance. Families from all walks of life entrusted to St Stylianos the enlightenment of their children, and he was forced to seek out larger headquarters and to recruit from the ranks of his hermit friends the assistance needed to tend to so many. His was probably the first day-care center of the world, where mothers could safely leave their children while tending to other matters of the home.

St Stylianos was inadvertently qualified to become the patron saint of children yet to be born, owing to his miraculous intercession for a young woman who helped him with children but could bear none of her own. When the woman conceived, her husband out of sheer joy spread the word of this miracle, and before long many barren women came to the great hermit. Those whose faith in Jesus Christ was genuine became fertile. The cheerful countenance of St Stylianos was his hallmark, because he seemed always to be smiling, Now and then, however, he would be challenged by an outraged discreditor of little faith, and only then would the beaming hermit's face darken with a scowl. He was also approached by greedy mercenaries with all manner of propositions for commercializing his talents and reaping a tidy fortune, but for these people he always had the same answer: that he had been paid in advance for his services when the serenity of the Holy Spirit came upon him. He would smile as they left. He lived to a ripe old age, and it is said that, when he was buried his countenance still beamed with a faint smile from the light of the Lord.

Our Holy Father Innocent, Bishop of Irkutsk (1731)

He was descended from a noble family near Chernigov. He became a monk at the Lavra of the Kiev Caves in 1706 and in 1721 was consecrated bishop. He was sent as a missionary to China but, due to political complications, could not gain entry into the country and settled temporarily near Lake Baikal in Siberia. He and his companions soon ran out of money and were forced to live for a time on alms and by day- labor. Rather than become discouraged, Saint Innocent made use of this time to learn the native language and found a school for the local Mongol people, many of whom he brought to the faith.

In 1722 he was appointed Bishop of Irkutsk, a diocese that covered all the huge area of eastern Siberia. At the time of his appointment there were only about thirty churches in the whole diocese. For ten years the bishop devoted himself to converting the Mongol peoples, preaching to them and catechizing

them in their own language. At the same time he worked for moral reform among the Russian Orthodox people of the region. As bishop, he lived in the Monastery of the Ascension in Irkutsk, where he established a firm ascetical life, in which he himself took a full part. He spent every night in prayer, meditation on the writings of the Fathers, and preparing sermons in both Russian and the local languages.

Under the strain of the cruel Siberian climate the Saint fell ill and reposed in 1731. Many miracles take place to this day at his tomb. Among the people of Siberia he is honored as highly as Saint Nicholas and counted as the Enlightener of their land.

Our Holy Father Alypius the Stylite (~607)

He was from Adrianopolis in Bythinia, and took up the ascetical life at a young age. After many spiritual struggles he took up residence on a pillar, where he dwelt for fifty-three years. Crowds came to seek his intercession and counsel, and in time a women's monastery was founded near the pillar. At times an unearthly light was seen to radiate from the top of the pillar, accompanied by thunder and lightning. He owned nothing, and once threw his only tunic down to a poor man in need, leaving himself completely exposed to the elements until a recluse dwelling nearby saw his condition and came to his help.

After fifty-three years, Alypius suffered a stroke which paralyzed half his body, but he continued to live on the pillar for another fourteen years, giving up his soul to God at the age of ninety-nine.

St Nikon Metanoite ("Repent!") (~1000)

He was born about 930 to a pious and wealthy family near Trebizond. Once, making an inspection of the family's estates, he was so affected by the wretched conditions of the poor fieldworkers that he despaired of happiness in this world and determined to live a monastic life.

After years spent in a monastery, where he shone in obedience, prayer and self-denial, the Saint was given leave to travel in the ministry of the Gospel of Christ. For three years he wandered the East, without home or possessions, crying to everyone he met, "Repent!" and proclaiming with tears the message of salvation in Christ. He then spent seven years in Crete, then went to Greece, walking barefoot from place to place, preaching repentance and becoming so well known that he acquired the nickname "Metanoite," meaning "Repent!"

After driving a great plague from Sparta through his prayers, he settled near that city, building a great church dedicated to Christ the Savior, and living in the church for the remainder of his life. In time, a monastery was attached to the church for his disciples. His last counsel to his disciples was: "Flee pride, cleave to humility; do not despise the poor; keep clear of all evil, of all envy and of the remembrance of wrongs; forgive your brethren. Go regularly to church and confess your sins often to the priests and spiritual fathers. If you keep to these counsels, I will never abandon you." He then gave his soul back

to God.

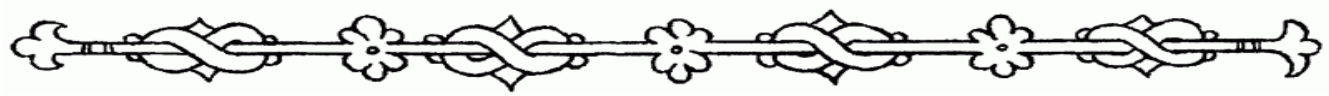
Saint Nikon was immediately venerated as a saint by the people of Sparta, and is regarded as the protector of the city, where his relics are venerated to this day.

Holy New Martyr George of Chios (1897)

He was born of Christian parents on Chios. As a boy he was caught stealing melons from a garden with some companions. Brought before the Turkish judge, in fear of punishment he agreed to become a Muslim with the name Ahmed. (This was common practice under the Turkokratia: a Christian brought before the courts would be offered his freedom in return for conversion to Islam. Many gave in.) He returned home, weeping and lamenting his apostasy, and his parents put him (now aged ten) in the care of a good Christian woman to strengthen him in the faith and hide him from the Turkish authorities. At the age of twenty-one he was engaged to a young woman of the town, but quarreled with her brother who, knowing George's past, went to the authorities and denounced him as an apostate from Islam. George was imprisoned and tortured, but rather than breaking him down his torments strengthened his love of Christ, and he resolved to offer up his life for Him. The priests and faithful of the town held all-night vigil, praying God to give courage to His New Martyr. At daybreak, George was led to the place of execution, saying over and over again the names of the Lord Jesus and his blessed Mother. He was shot, then beheaded, joining the ranks of the holy Martyrs.

Venerable Stylianus of Paphlagonia

Venerable James the Anchorite



Day 26-Nov-2023 Sunday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

The Rich Young Ruler
Colossians 3:12-16; Luke 18:18-27
12 As God's elect, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with a heart of compassion,
kindness, lowliness, humility, and perseverance.
13 Bear with one another, and forgive each other! If anyone has a complaint
against anyone else, forgive, even as Christ forgave you.
14 Above all, walk in love, which is the bond of perfection.
15 Let the peace of God (to which also you were called in one body) rule in your
hearts, and be thankful! 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.
In all wisdom, teach and admonish each other with psalms, hymns, and spiritual
songs, singing with grace in your heart to the Lord.

Gospel Reading: 13th Sunday of Luke: The Rich Young Ruler

18 A certain ruler asked
him, 'Good Teacher, what
shall I do to inherit eternal
life?' 19 Jesus asked him,
'Why do you call me good?
No one is good, except one-
God.
20 You know the
commandments: 'Do not
commit adultery,' 'Do not
murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do
not bear false witness,'
'Honor your father and your
mother.
21 The ruler replied, 'I have
observed all these things
from my youth.
22 When Jesus heard this, he said, 'You still lack one thing.
Sell all that you have, distribute it to the poor, and you will have a treasure in
heaven.
Then come, follow me.
23 But when the man heard these things, he became very distressed because he

was very rich.
24 Jesus, seeing that he had become very distressed, said, 'How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter into the Kingdom of God! 25 Indeed, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for someone who is wealthy to enter into the Kingdom of God!' 26 Those who heard this exclaimed, 'Then, who can be saved?' 27 But Jesus replied, 'The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING
What shall I do to inherit eternal life? This is an important question that each of us should ask.
But we shall only ask it if we believe in life after death.
A recent media report stated that a Dutch pastor told his flock to make the most of this life and that he had no talent for believing in life after death.
Of course this life is important.
What we do here determines where we are in the next life.
There is no repentance in the grave.
But it is not only this life which counts.
It is a preparation for the next, which we believe in not the least because our Saviour spoke of it.
Eternal life is a gift from God.
We inherit it from the Lord.
The Lord answered the rich man’s question about what he should do by directing him to the commandments of the Mosaic Law.
Christ said if you love me keep my commandments (Jon. 14: 15), and in the chronicles by Barsanuphius and John we read that, if one loves someone and does not fulfil what he hears from him, this is more like hatred.
The commandments are a projection of the Divine Life on earth.
The Lord enjoins us to love our enemies because he does.
He sends the rain upon the just and the unjust (Matt. 5: 45). And if we keep his word then we become like him, we have his reactions, and this is the meaning of ‘theosis’.
The Lord did not mention all the commandments to his enquirer.
He mentioned five, of which four are negative – not about what we should do but about what we must not do.
It is only the fifth in the list which is positive and in the Decalogue it comes before the others.
Now from the end of the passage we see that the ruler was attached to his riches.
It is so easy to be attached to our worldly successes in whatever field, that we are unable to forgo them even for Christ’s and the Kingdom’s sake.
So, the Lord reminded him of the four commandments that concern our relations with our neighbour.
Though they are negative, if we follow them, then at least we do not close our

heart to our neighbour.
The rich man ‘had kept these from his youth’.
Yet it is not enough to abstain from evil.
We should also do good by keeping all the Lord’s precepts, which changes us from being selfish to selfless.
The Lord does not leave us to despair.
Yes, it is difficult to forget our riches, of whatever kind, and because of this, hard for us – well-nigh impossible – to enter the Kingdom with them.
But the Lord in his compassion does not abandon us in our weakness.
'What is impossible for man is possible for God".
Nonetheless, if we keep the ruler’s question before us: 'What shall I do....' our life will be seen through a different prism, which will help us to free ourselves from attachment to the things of this world and offer ourselves unstintingly to our Lord.

Day 28-Nov-2023 Tuesday

Fast Day/ oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Our Holy Father, Confessor and Martyr Stephen the New (767)

He was born in Constantinople in 715 to pious parents named John and Anna. His mother had prayed often to the most holy Theotokos to be granted a son, and received a revelation from our Lady that she would conceive the son she desired. When the child was born, she named him Stephen, following a prophecy of the Patriarch St Germanos (commemorated May 12). Stephen entered monastic life as a youth, and so distinguished himself in asceticism and virtue that the hermits of Mt Auxentius appointed him their leader at a young age.

'During the reign of Constantine V (741-775), Stephen showed his love of Orthodoxy in contending for the Faith... Besides being a fierce Iconoclast, Constantine raised up a ruthless persecution of monasticism. He held a council in 754 that anathematized the holy icons. Because Saint Stephen rejected this council, the Emperor framed false accusations against him and exiled him. But while in exile Saint Stephen performed healings with holy icons and turned many away from Iconoclasm. When he was brought before the Emperor again, he showed him a coin and asked whose image the coin bore. "Mine," said the tyrant. "If any man trample upon thine image, is he liable to punishment?" asked the Saint. When they that stood by answered yes, the Saint groaned because of their blindness, and said if they thought dishonouring the image of a corruptible king worthy of punishment, what torment would they receive who trampled upon the image of the Master Christ and of the Mother of God? Then he threw the coin to the ground and trampled on it. He was condemned to eleven months in bonds and imprisonment. Later, he was dragged over the earth and was stoned, like Stephen the First Martyr; wherefore he is called Stephen the New. Finally, he was struck with a wooden club on the temple and his head was shattered, and thus he gave up his spirit in the year 767.' (Great Horologion)

Holy Martyr Irenarchus and his Companions

Holy Martyrs of Tiberiopolis

Day 28-Nov-2023 Tuesday

Fast Day/ oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.
Readings of the day: 1 Timothy 1:8-14; Luke 14:25-35
1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Savior, and Christ Jesus our hope; 2to Timothy, my true child in faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.
A different doctrine 3As I urged you when I was going into Macedonia, stay at Ephesus in order to command certain individuals not to teach a different doctrine 4 or to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies.
These are a cause of disputes rather than God's stewardship, which is in faith.
5The goal of this instruction is love, out of a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith.
6 But some have wandered away from these things, missing the mark and turning to vain discussions.
7 They desire to be teachers of the law, although they do not understand what they are talking about, or what it is that they so strongly affirm.

Gospel reading:
12 Jesus also said to the one who had invited him, 'When you make a dinner or a supper, do not call your friends, brothers, kinsmen or rich neighbors because they might return the favor and pay you back.
13 Instead, when you give a feast, ask the poor, the maimed, the lame, or the blind [to come].
14 Then, you will be blessed, because they do not have the means to pay you back.
For you will be repaid in the resurrection of the righteous.
The parable of the great feast or banquet 15 When one of those who sat at the table with him heard these things, he said to Jesus, 'Blessed is the one who will feast in the Kingdom of God!'

Day 29-Nov-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Martyr Paramon and his 370 Companions (~250)

"Akylinus, the Governor of Bithynia in the reign of the Emperor Decius (249-51), was leaving for the hot springs at Bisaltia, when he decided to make 370 Christians from Nicomedia, who had been imprisoned on his orders, worship in the temple of Isis. On their refusal to do so, they were all beheaded. Seeing this massacre, the righteous Paramon cried out: 'What a wicked deed to slaughter so many righteous men, and strangers moreover, as if they were animals.' The Governor heard these words and had Paramon seized and taken with him under guard. On the road he was mistreated in various ways by the soldiers. Some of them struck him with their spears, others excised his tongue and other members, and he was finally put to death in the presence of the Governor." (Synaxarion)

Note: of the various persecutions launched by the pagan Emperors before St Constantine, the persecution under Decius was probably the fiercest and bloodiest.

Our Holy Father Pitirim of Egypt (4th c.)

"Abba Pitirim directed a group of ascetics who led a very austere life in the arid mountains of the Thebaid. He was himself a disciple and third successor of Saint Anthony the Great (17 Jan.) in his hermitage. He ate no more than a little flour mixed with water twice a week, and so persevered in spiritual labours that he gained abundant graces from the Holy Spirit. Among other things, he taught that to each passion there corresponds a demon who tries to stir up that passion within us through different temptations. In order to get rid of these demons and of evil thoughts, Abba Pitirim said that we must first free our hearts from passions." (Synaxarion)

Venerable Akakios of Sinai who is mentioned in *The Ladder*

Holy Martyr Dionysius, Bishop of Corinth

Day 29-Nov-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 1 Timothy 1:18-20, 2:8-15; Luke 15:1-10
18 I commit this instruction to you, my child Timothy, according to the prophecies made earlier which singled you out.
By them, may you fight the good fight,
19 keeping the faith and a good conscience.
Some have rejected these and made a shipwreck of the faith,
20 including Hymenaeus and Alexander.
I delivered them to Satan so that they might learn not to blaspheme.
2 Therefore, I encourage that first of all, petitions, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for all: 2 for kings and all in high places, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and piety.
3 Indeed, this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior
4 who desires all people to be saved and to come to the full knowledge of the truth.
5 There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all- this testimony [was given] in its own times.
7 I was appointed a preacher and an apostle of these things (I am telling the truth in Christ, not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.
8 I desire, therefore, that in every place, the men should pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or doubting.
9 In the same way, women should wear decent clothing, modest and fitting, without elaborate hairstyle, gold, pearls, or expensive clothing, 10 but with good works (which is fitting for women professing godliness).
11 Let a woman learn in quietness, with all submission.
12 I do not allow a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man, but to be silent; 13 because Adam was first formed, then Eve.
14 Adam was not deceived, but the woman, being deceived, fell into disobedience.
15 However, women will be saved through childbearing, as they remain in faith, love and sanctifying self-restraint.

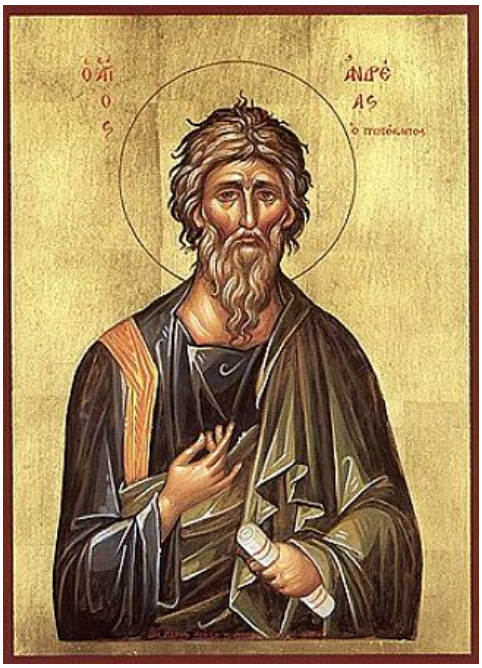
Gospel Reading:
1 Now, all the tax collectors and sinners were coming close to him to hear him.
2 But the Pharisees and scribes began to grumble, saying, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them!' 3 So Jesus told them this parable.

4 'Which one of you, if you had one hundred sheep and lost one of them, would
not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that was lost, until
he finds it? 5 And when he has found it, he carries it on his shoulders, rejoicing!
6 Coming home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, telling them, 'Rejoice
with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!'
7 I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner
who repents than over ninety-nine righteous who need no repentance.
8 Or what woman, if she had ten drachma coins and lost one, would not light a
lamp, sweep the house, and look hard until she finds it?
9 And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying:
'Rejoice with me, for I have found the drachma coin which I had lost!'
10 Likewise, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one
sinner who repents.

Day 30-Nov-2023 Thursday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

† Holy, Glorious and Illustrious Apostle Andrew the First-Called



As the first to be called by Jesus Christ into his service, St. Andrew commands a reverence a degree greater than those who have followed. For this reason, St. Andrew is called Protokletos, or "First-called."

St. Andrew, like his brother St. Peter, was a fisherman, a toiler with net and boat recognised in the Psalms of the

Old Testament as one of those "who go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord and his wonders in the deep." His love of the sea stemmed from his love of the Creator who made it, and the perils of the sea which he challenged daily forged the character with which he boldly assailed the seas of ignorance and paganism in the sacred trust that had been placed in his keeping.

St. Andrew, who lived in the Holy Land in the ancient city of Bethsaida, accepted Christ with all his heart and after a discipleship with St. John the Baptist went forth to become one of the greatest missionaries in all history. When the apostles drew lots to determine their sphere of labour for the Saviour, St. Andrew exulted in his mission to preach in Asia Minor, part of Greece, and an area along the coast of the Black Sea, including its gateway, the city now known as Istanbul, or Constantinople.

Wherever St. Andrew went he attracted throngs of people who thirsted for a spiritual knowledge. His message of deliverance was so eloquently convincing, even to hostile minds, that he is credited with having converted countless thousands to Christianity in a day when mass media did not exist. As an apostle, his only tools were his power of oratory and his love for Jesus, and his only press agent was the word of mouth of those privileged to hear his homilies.

St. Andrew came to Jerusalem for the First Synod of the Apostles, about 50 AD, another historic first for him and the other apostles, some of whom he had not yet met. There he rejoiced in joining the great St. Peter together with those but for whom Christianity might never have become the glorious human

experience it is today. Out of the Synod, the apostles went forth with renewed vigour to establish the ecclesiastical system.

St. Andrew alone is credited with having set up parishes throughout Asia Minor, in Pontos, Bithynia, Thrace, Macedonia, Greece, Scythia (Russia, where he is still regarded as patron saint) and in the capital city of Byzantium. It was in Byzantium that St. Andrew ordained Stachys as first bishop of Byzantium (later Constantinople), thereby establishing an unbroken line of 270 patriarchs down to the present day Patriarch Bartholomeos 1st. From Byzantium, St. Andrew went on to more glory through his compelling oratory and power of healing through Jesus Christ. He eventually found himself in Achaia, in the city of Patras, where he was to suffer death.

St. Andrew committed the grave crime in the eyes of the state of converting Maximilla, wife of the ruler Aigeates, to Christianity. Despite the fact that he was then eighty years old, it was ordered that he be put to death by being nailed upside down to an X-shaped cross. After three days of agony on this vile device, St. Andrew died. The great fisherman had cast his net for Christ for the last time. St. Andrew's remains were brought to Constantinople two hundred years later and in 1460 his head was given to the pope. On 24 September 1964, in an ecumenical gesture, the head was returned to the people of Patras by the pope.

Our Venerable Father Frumentius, first Bishop of Ethiopia (4th c.)

During the reign of St Constantine the Great, an explorer named Meropus set out to explore lands along the Red Sea, previously unknown to the Roman world. The expedition's ship was attacked by pirates and all the company killed except two young men named Frumentius and Edesius. They were sold into slavery in the court of the Ethiopian King of Axum, where they distinguished themselves so well that they became palace stewards and were able to obtain freedom of Christian worship for merchants trading in the Kingdom.

Eventually the young men returned to Roman territory, and Frumentius went to St Athanasius the Great of Alexandria to tell him of his travels and of the great thirst of the Ethiopian people for the Gospel of Christ. Saint Athanasius consecrated Frumentius as first Bishop of Abyssinia and sent him back to Axum to establish the Church in that kingdom.

Through his apostolic zeal, tireless travels, and miracles and healings, the holy Bishop was able convert many pagans and establish many churches in Ethiopia, though the Kingdom did not become officially Christian until the sixth century. Saint Frumentius reposed in peace in his adopted country, and his relics worked many miracles.

The Church of Ethiopia traces its origin to the apostolic work of the Ethiopian eunuch baptized by the Apostle Philip in the Book of Acts, who "went on his way rejoicing" to Ethiopia and first proclaimed the Gospel there. Thus, it seems there was already a Christian presence in the country when

Frumentius arrived: this may be the source of the statement in his biography that he found the Ethiopian people thirsty for the Good News.

Day 30-Nov-2023 Thursday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.
Readings of the day: 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Luke 16:1-9
3 This is a sure word: if a man aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a good work.
2 The overseer must be irreproachable, husband of one wife, self-controlled, sensible, modest, hospitable and a good teacher.
3 He must not be a drinker; or someone violent or greedy for money.
He should be gentle, not irritable or envious.
4 He should be someone who rules his own house well, keeping his [own] children in subjection with all reverence.
5 (Indeed, if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how can he take care of the Church of God?) 6 He should not be a new convert, for fear that being puffed up with pride he may fall into the same condemnation as the devil.
7 Moreover, he must have good testimony from those who are outside in order to avoid falling into [public] blame and the snare of the devil.
8 Deacons, in the same way, must be reverent, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine and not greedy for money.
9 They should keep the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.
10 Let them also be tested first; then let them serve if they are blameless.
11 Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers but self-controlled and faithful in all things.
12 Deacons should be husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.
13 Those who have served well earn for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Gospel Reading:
1 Jesus also said to his disciples, 'There was a certain rich man who had a manager.
An accusation was made to him that this man was wasting his possessions.
2 He called his manager and told him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Give an accounting of your stewardship, for you can no longer be [my] steward.
3 The manager said within himself, 'What will I do, seeing that my lord is taking away the management position from me? I do not have strength to dig! I am ashamed to beg!
4 I know what I will do, so that when I am removed from management, people may

receive me into their houses.
5 Calling each one of his lord's debtors to him, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe to my lord?' 6 The man replied, 'A hundred measures of oil.
The manager said to him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly and write fifty.
7 Then he said to another, 'How much do you owe?' That one replied, 'A hundred cors of wheat.
The manager said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.
8 His master praised the dishonest manager because he had acted wisely, for the children of this world are wiser than the children of the light in [dealing with] their own kind.
9 I tell you, make for yourselves friends by means of unrighteous mammone, so that when it fails you, you may be received into the eternal dwellings.

Day 01-Dec-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Prophet Nahum (7th c. BC)

He was a Galilean of the tribe of Simeon. The Old Testament book that bears his name foretells the destruction of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, by the Medes, and the restoration of the Kingdom of Judah; all of this came to pass. Nahum is counted as the seventh of the Minor Prophets. He reposed in peace. His name means 'consolation' or 'repose.'

Five of the Prophets (Nahum, Habbakuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, and Daniel) are commemorated in December. At one time a Feast of the Twelve Prophets was celebrated on December 4 at the Church of the Resurrection, but this feast is no longer on the calendar. The days leading up to Christ's Nativity contain many commemorations of the faithful remnant of Israel, all of whose hopes were fulfilled in the birth of the Messiah.

Saint Philaret the Merciful of Constantinople (762)

He was a wealthy landed gentleman who lived in the countryside near Constantinople during the reign of the Empress Irene. God had given him great wealth and a large family with which to enjoy his later years in contentment. A true lover of God, he gave without hesitation to all the poor and needy who came to him, and freely offered hospitality to every traveler passing through his lands.

But his fortunes changed dramatically, and after a series of disasters he was reduced to poverty, with only a small piece of land, a pair of oxen, a donkey, a horse, a cow and a calf and a few beehives to sustain himself and his family. Without complaint, he took up the life of a simple farmer, laboring to support his family with his few means.

His reduced fortunes in no way changed his open-handed character; and when he met a peasant lamenting the death of his two oxen, he immediately gave him his own, leaving himself no way to till his field. When his wife and children expressed their dismay, he answered with Christ's words, 'Do not be anxious for your life, what you shall eat, or what you shall drink... but seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.' He asked his wife and children to be patient, for soon they would see a treasure that he was keeping hidden.

Continuing in every way as generous as he had been when wealthy, he had soon given away his horse, then his cow and calf, then his donkey (with a

load of grain it was carrying at the time), to the few people he met who were poorer than himself. Without any means of feeding himself or his family, he received a generous gift of provisions from a wealthy friend; he divided the gift among his family members, then gave his own portion to the poor. He then gave away his beehives, and finally the coat from his back to a beggar who asked him for food. Thus he was left completely stripped of possessions, depending only on God to care for himself and his family.

At that time, emissaries from the Court of Constantinople passed through the neighborhood, sent out to seek a fair maiden of good family to be considered as a bride for the young Emperor Constantine VI. Philaret received them in his once-splendid house and, impressed by his virtues and those of his family, they asked two of his grand-daughters to return to the Court with them. There, the two ladies' physical and spiritual beauty shone so brightly that one of them was wed to the Emperor, the other to one of his chief courtiers. The Emperor summoned Philaret and the rest of his family to the Palace, where he appointed Philaret Consul and gave him greater riches than he had possessed in former days. The Saint, restored to prosperity, continued in generosity as before: His first act was to give a lavish feast to which he invited the poor, old and disabled of the City. He then spent his days walking the streets of the City, distributing alms to the poor, giving to all who asked with no consideration of the merits of their case. (He brought with him a servant who carried three bags of coins: one of gold, one of silver, and one of copper. When he met a needy person, the Saint reached at random into a bag and gave him a handful of coins, thus letting God decide the size of the gift).

When the Saint drew near to death, he gathered his family and urged them to distribute all the remainder of his wealth to the needy. 'My children, do not forget hospitality; visit those who are sick or in prison, watch over widows and orphans; see to the burial of those who die in poverty; do not covet the goods of others; speak no ill of anyone, and do not be glad of misfortunes that befall your enemies; always do as you have seen me do in my life, so that God will keep you under His protection.' Then, his face shining with joy, he gave up his soul to God.

Our Venerable Father Eligius (Eloi), Bishop of Noyon (660)

He was born to a Christian family near Limoges in Gaul (modern-day France) in 588. He became a goldsmith, worked for the royal mint, and in time became a trusted counselor of King Chlothar II. Despite (or because of) the honors and riches that surrounded him, Eligius came to despise all of them and gave away all his property but what he considered essential for everyday life. He devoted all his income to almsgiving and to ransoming prisoners of all nationalities from the slave markets. Many of these became his attendants and disciples in gratitude. Eligius' compassion became so well-known that when visitors asked for directions to his house, they would be told, 'Look for the house surrounded by a crowd of beggars. That is where Lord Eligius lives.'

The Saint washed the feet of the poor who came to him, served them at his own table and fed himself on what they left. If he ran out of money, he would give away furniture or even his clothing.

When King Chlothar died in 629, Eligius became the counselor of his successor King Dagobert I. He founded monasteries for men at Solignac and for women in Paris, telling the King, 'These are the ladders by which we will both be able to climb up to the Kingdom of Heaven.' As a royal counselor he helped to re-establish peace between France and Brittany, and improved the law of the kingdom to make it more just.

When Dagobert died in 639, Eligius devoted himself entirely to the service of God as Bishop of Noyon in Flanders. His diocese was still mostly pagan, and Eligius traveled untiringly to preach the Gospel of Christ, often at risk of his life. Having foreseen his approaching death, Saint Eligius reposed in peace in 660. When his tomb was opened a year later, his body was found incorrupt and gave forth a fragrant scent.

Venerable Antony of Kios

Day 01-Dec-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 1 Timothy 4:4-8, 16; Luke 16:15-18, 17:1-4
4 Everything that God has created is good and nothing is to be rejected, if it is
received with thanksgiving.
5 Indeed, it is sanctified through the word of God and prayer.
Advice for Timothy 6 If you instruct the brethren of these things, you will be a good
servant of Christ Jesus, nourished in the words of the faith and by the good
doctrine which you have [always] followed.
7 Reject profane and old wives' fables.
Train yourself for godliness.
8 Physical exercise has some value, but godliness has value in all things, having a
promise for the present life as well as for the one to come.
16 Watch yourself and your teaching Continue in these things! In doing so, you will
save both yourself and those who hear you.
Gospel reading:

15 Jesus told them, 'You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of people,
but God knows your hearts.
Indeed, what is exalted among people is an abomination in the sight of God.
16 The law and the prophets were [proclaimed] until John [came].
Since then, the Good News of the Kingdom of God is preached, and everyone
enters into it with a struggle.
17 Yet, it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tiny stroke of a
pen in the law to fall [out].
18 Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another [woman] commits
adultery; and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.
1 Jesus told the disciples, 'It is impossible that no occasions of stumbling should
come, but woe to the one through whom they come! 2 It would be better for such a
person to have a millstone hung around the neck and be thrown into the sea,
rather than to cause any of these little ones to stumble.
3 Be careful! If your brother sins against you, rebuke him.
If he repents, forgive him.
4 If he sins against you seven times in the day, and comes back seven times,
saying: 'I repent!' you must forgive him.

Day 02-Dec-2023 Saturday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Holy Prophet Habbakuk (Abbacum) (7th c. BC).

He prophesied in the time of Joachim, just before the Jewish people were taken into captivity in Babylon. He himself escaped captivity, and after Jerusalem was destroyed, returned to his homeland. Once he was taking some food to his harvesters when an Angel transported him to Babylon to feed the Prophet Daniel in the lions' den, then bore him back to Judea (this is told in the full version of the book of Daniel, ch. 6 LXX). The third chapter of his prophecy is used as the Fourth Ode of the Matins Canon(the Ode is usually sung in full only in monasteries during Lent, but the eirmos of the Fourth Ode, sung in many parishes, usually refers to the Prophet). His holy relics were found through a revelation in Palestine during the reign of Theodosius the Great, and a chapel built there. His name means "Father of the Resurrection."

Holy Martyr Myrope (Myropea) of Chios (251)

She was born in Ephesus. At baptism, she was consecrated by her mother to serve at the shrine of St Hermione, one of the four daughters of the Apostle Philip. Many pilgrims came to be anointed with a miracle-working myrrh that flowed from St Hermione's body — and from her service at the shrine Myrope received the name by which she is known. Later, she and her mother went to the island of Chios to flee the persecution of the Emperor Decius.

When the holy martyr Isidore (May 14) was beheaded, Myrope secretly recovered his body and gave it honorable burial. The governor Numerius was furious, and ordered his soldiers to find the body or themselves be beheaded. Unable to let innocent people suffer for her act, Myrope presented herself to the governor and told him where she had buried the body. At Numerius' order, the holy girl was tortured and thrown in prison. There a heavenly light illuminated her cell and St Isidore himself appeared to her with a company of angels, saying 'Peace to thee, Myrope: thy prayer has ascended to God, and thou shalt soon be with us and receive the crown prepared for thee.' Myrope, filled with joy, gave up her soul to God at that moment. One of the guards who had witnessed these events believed in Christ, and not long afterward was baptized and received a martyr's death.

Our Holy Father Athanasius "the Resurrected," Recluse of the Kiev Caves (1176)

After many years of ascetic struggle, Athanasius died and was prepared for burial. After lying dead for two full days, he inexplicably came back to life: the monks who came to bury him were astonished to find him sitting up and weeping. The brethren gathered around him and asked him many questions about what he had seen of the next world, but he would only answer 'Save yourselves!' When they pressed him further, he said 'If I told you, you would not believe me or want to listen to me.' His final reply was 'Repent every moment, and pray to the Lord Jesus Christ and to His most pure Mother.' He then shut himself in his cell and lived another twelve years, taking only bread and water and never speaking again to anyone.

Saint (Stephen) Uroš, King of Serbia (1367)

"The son of King Dušan, he ruled during the difficult time of the fall of the Kindom of Serbia. Humble, pious and gentle, he refused to attempt to restrain the power of the powerful nobles by force. Amongst these was Vukašin, who brought about his death. Good King Uroš suffered a martyr's death on December 2nd, 1367, at the age of thirty-one. Killed by men, he was glorified by God. His wonderworking relics were preserved in the monastery of Jazak in the Fruška Gora, whence they were taken to Belgrade in 1942, during the Second World War, and placed in the Cathedral beside the bodies of Prince Lazar and Despot Stephen Štiljanovic. During the reign of this benevolent king, the monastery of St Nahum was built beside Lake Ochrid by one of Uroš's nobles, Grgur." (Prologue)

Saint Porphyrios of Kavsokalyvia (1991) (Nov. 19 OC)

Saint Porphyrios (Bairaktaris) was born in 1907 with the name Evangelos in Evoia, Greece, in the small village of *Agios Ioannis* (Saint John). As a child he tended to the sheep in the hills, and it is there that he first read the life of Saint John the Hut-Dweller (Commemorated January 15th) which planted the desire of monasticism in his heart. The spark lit by Saint John was fanned when at the age of seven he overheard a conversation about the divine beauty of the Holy Mountain. Eventually he stowed away on a boat to Thessalonica, hoping from there to reach Mount Athos.

On the evening after his arrival, a group of monks gathered at the harbor to take the boat to Mount Athos. One of them noticed the young Porphyrios and asked him where he was going. Porphyrios told the monk that he was going to the Holy Mountain, but lied about the reason as to why. The monk, seeing

through this, told Porphyrios to tell any inquirers that he was his nephew and that his mother had passed away, for otherwise he would not be allowed on the mountain since he was still a child.

The monk, whose name was Panteleimon, became his spiritual father and brought him to Kavsokalyvia, a small skete where Panteleimon lived with his brother, the Priest Ioannikos, as fellow monastics. The young Porphyrios loved to carry out the virtue of obedience to his elders, at times being tested by them without even knowing it. When he was fourteen, his elder asked Porphyrios what he was planning to do with his life. The young man told him that he wished to stay on the Mountain. Two or three years later, Porphyrios was tonsured with the name Nikitas.

Once, being obedient to one of his elders against the wishes of the other, Porphyrios went out on a rainy day to collect snails. After hours of filling his sack, and burdened by the wind and cold, Porphyrios found himself suddenly caught in a rockslide and was buried up to his knees. Crying out to the Theotokos he was miraculously delivered, but having suffered badly he developed pleurisy and had to leave Mount Athos to seek medical treatment. The elder who told him to collect the snails profusely apologized, and personally saw Porphyrios off of Mount Athos, kissing him on the forehead in tears.

Porphyrios returned to the village of *Agios Ioannis* in Evoia where he reunited with his family. He stayed at the monastery of Saint Haralambos, which was near the village Avlonari, until he recovered. his good reputation as a faithful and obedient monk quickly spread and thus caught the attention of the Bishop Fostinis of Kymi. He began to visit Porphyrios frequently, and with the aid of Archbishop Porphyrios III of Sinai (from whom Porphyrios was given his final name), ordained the young monk a deacon and then a priest. Two years later he was made a confessor and would at times hear confessions for multiple days at a time without sleep or food.

His next major ministry was serving as the Chaplain at the Polyclinic Hospital in Athens for roughly 33 years (1940-1973). It was through the well-known Professor of Canon Law, Amilkas Alivizatos, that Porphyrios was assigned to the Church of Saint Gerasimos which was associated with the hospital. During this time he helped many patients spiritually by acting as their father confessor. In addition to his hospital duties, he helped to renew the Church of Saint Nicholas in Kallisia, often having recourse to it during the night to pray by himself or with family.

However, Porphyrios had still been unable to fulfill another dream he shared with his family: founding a monastery. After years of searching, he bought

some land upon the top of a hill in Milesi where he later founded The Holy Monastery of the Transfiguration. He remained there for many years before returning to his old cell on Mount Athos where he spent his last years. He departed this life on December 2nd, 1991. Porphyrios was declared a saint by the Ecumenical Patriarchate on June 27th, 2013.

Saint Uros, King of Serbia
Our Righteous Father Cyril of Phileus
Saint Jesse, Bishop of Tsilkani
Moses the Confessor

Day 02-Dec-2023 Saturday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.
Readings of the day: Galatians 3:8-12; Luke 9:57-62
8 As foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, the Scripture
announced the future Good News to Abraham by saying, 'In you all the nations will
be blessed.
a 9 And so, those of faith are blessed with the faithful Abraham.
10 But those who depend on the works of the law are under a curse, for it is
written: Cursed is everyone who does not persevere in all the things that are
written in the book of the law, to do them.
b 11 Now, it is obvious that no one is justified by the law before God, because 'The
righteous will live by faith.
c 12 The law is not of faith, but, 'The one who does these things will live by them.

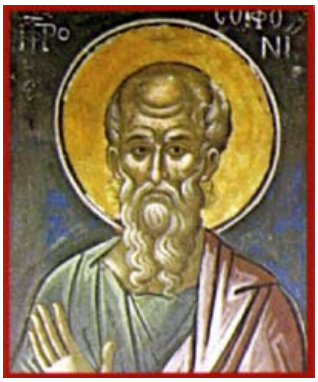
Gospel Reading:

57 As they went on the way, a certain man said to him, 'I want to follow you
wherever you go, Lord!' 58 Jesus said to him, 'The foxes have holes, and the birds
of heaven have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.
59 He said to another, 'Follow me!' But the man said, 'Lord, allow me first to go and
bury my father.
60 But Jesus replied, 'Leave the dead to bury their own dead.
But you go and announce the Kingdom of God.
61 Another also said, 'I want to follow you, Lord, but first allow me to say goodbye
to those who are at my house!' 62 But Jesus said to him, 'No one who has put his
hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God.

Day 03-Dec-2023 Sunday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Holy Prophet Zephaniah (Sophonias) (7th c. BC)



He is ranked ninth among the Minor Prophets. He lived in Jerusalem in the reign of King Josiah (640-609), and according to some was the great-grandson of King Hezekiah. His name means "The Lord Protects" or "The Lord's watch-post."

Our Venerable Father John the Silent, Bishop of Colonia (558)

He was born into a Christian family at Nikopolis in Armenia. When he was eighteen his parents died, and with twelve other young men he established a small monastery. After a few years, much against his will he was made Bishop of Colonia, but he continued to live the ascetic life of a monk. After nine years of service as bishop, discouraged by the worldliness and intrigue around him, he secretly left for Jerusalem to live as a monk. He was divinely guided to the monastery of St Sabas, who received him and, knowing nothing of his rank, assigned him a lowly place among the new monks. Saint John cheerfully undertook whatever task was given to him and served the other monks in humility and silence. After completing his novitiate he was given a cell where he lived in total silence, fasting five days a week. On Saturdays and Sundays he joined the brethren for prayer, Communion and meals; but even at these times the other monks were edified by his silence and unceasing compunction. Saint Sabas desired to make him a priest and took him to be ordained by the Patriarch of Jerusalem. Saint John asked the Patriarch for a private meeting and explained that he could not be ordained because he was already a bishop. The Patriarch returned St John to St Sabas, telling him only that it was impossible for him to ordain John, who should be allowed to live in silence and solitude. Saint Sabas was perplexed (thinking that some sin prevented the monk from being ordained), but soon received a revelation of John's true rank.

After many years of reclusion, St John withdrew further to a cave in the desert for nine years. He became known as a divinely-enlightened counselor and a wonderworker, and cheerfully received all who came to him for guidance or prayer. In 509 he returned to the monastery, where he lived as an anchorite in his cell, communicating with the world only through one of his disciples. For many years he lived only on thin porridge, into which he would mix ashes. One day a disciple saw him pouring ashes into his food, and John

abandoned the practice, not wanting to be known for the practice of any virtue.

Once he asked God for a sign revealing whether he would be granted to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Taking a fig-seed, he placed it on a bare rock outside his cell. Without soil or water, the seed brought forth a plant, put forth leaves and flowers, and produced three figs, which St John shared with his disciples. The Saint then made ready for death. He reposed in peace, at the age of 104.

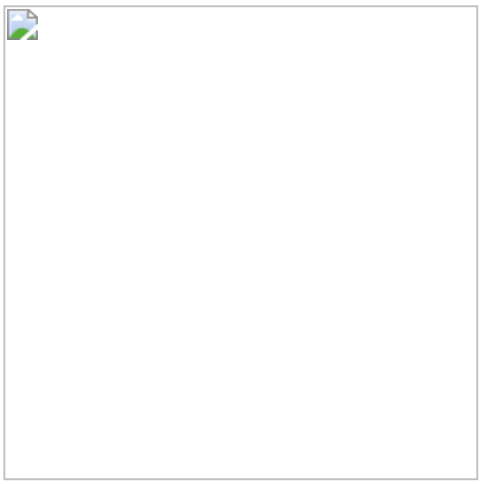
Venerable Theodulus
Venerable Sava of Zvenigorod
Venerable George of Cernica

Day 03-Dec-2023 Sunday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

The blind man of Jericho
Colossians 1:12-18; Luke 18:35-43

12 May you give thanks to the Father, who has granted use to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.
13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into the Kingdom of the Son of his love.
14 In him, we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins.
15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.
16 For in him, all things were created, in the heavens and on earth, things visible and invisible, thrones, dominions, principalities and powers; all things have been created through him, and for him.
17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.
18 He is the head of the body, the Church; [he is] the first cause, the firstborn from the dead, so that in all [things] he might have the first place.



35 As Jesus was approaching Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the road, begging.
36 Hearing a crowd going by, he asked what this meant.
37 People told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by.
38 He began to cry out, 'Jesus, you son of David, have mercy on me!' 39 Then, those who led the way rebuked him, ordering him to be quiet.
But the blind man cried out all the more, 'You son of David, have mercy on me!' 40 Standing still, Jesus commanded that the blind man be brought to him.
When the man had come near, Jesus asked him, 41 'What do you want me to do?'
The man replied, 'Lord, that I may see again!' 42 Jesus said to him, 'Receive your sight.
Your faith has healed you.
43 Immediately, the man received his sight and began to follow Jesus, glorifying

God.
When all the people saw this, they praised God.

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING

Today we read St Luke's account of Our Lord's healing of the blind man as He approached Jericho.
The blind man, unable to support his life without help, turns to the One Who can change his miserable condition.
He calls out asking for mercy.
His call for mercy is the call we repeat in the Litanies and we ask Him to «have mercy on us».
But the leaders of the crowd Jesus tell the blind man to stop, to be quiet.
He however shouts all the more, Son of David have mercy on me! He perseveres in spite of the rebukes and mockery, cares nothing for the opinion of others.
He knows his need better than they do, and he knows Who can meet his need and satisfy it.
Jesus stops and has him brought forward, and asks what he wants.
Not because he does not know, but so that the man can speak for himself when he says, Lord, let me be able to see again.
Our Lord's answer is clear and immediate: Receive your sight; your faith has saved you.
If we are struggling in our lives, unable to cope with the difficulties and demands of our personal character and situation, we generally look for help from others.
This does not free us from our difficulties, and our dependence becomes a heavier burden to us to bear.
In this small incident, related in eight verses, we see that the example of Whom we should ask, and how.
Not many words are necessary, but faith is essential, and must be expressed in spite of difficulties and opposition.
And it is our faith in Him, as Lord and King of all, as our Saviour, which will bring us mercy.
For He said: Ask and you shall receive (Matt. 7: 7) Having received, let us not return to our former condition, but, like the man who received his sight, follow Him, glorifying God.

Day 04-Dec-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Great Martyr Barbara (290)

This glorious follower of Christ was betrothed to Christ from early childhood. Her father Dioscorus was a pagan and was renowned for his position and wealth in the city of Heliopolis in Egypt. Dioscorus locked up his only daughter Barbara, brilliant in mind and of beautiful countenance, in a high tower. He surrounded her with every comfort, gave her female servants, erected idols for worship, and built her a bathing room with two windows. Looking through the window at the earth below and the starry heavens above, Barbara's mind was opened by the grace of God. She recognized the One True God, the Creator, despite the fact that she did not have a human teacher to bring her to this knowledge. Once, while her father was away from the city, she came down from the tower and, according to God's providence, met some Christian women who revealed the true Faith of Christ to her. Barbara's heart became inflamed with love for Christ the Lord. She ordered that a third window be cut open in the bath so that the three windows would represent the Holy Trinity. On one wall she traced a Cross with her finger, and the Cross etched itself deep in the stone as if cut by a chisel. A pool of water sprang forth from her footprints on the floor of the bath, which later gave healing of diseases to many. Learning of his daughter's faith, Dioscorus beat her severely and drove her from the tower. He pursued her in order to kill her, but a cliff opened up and hid Barbara from her brutal father. When she appeared again, her father brought her to Martianus, the magistrate, who handed her over for torture. They stripped the innocent Barbara and flogged her until her entire body was covered with blood and wounds, but the lord Himself appeared to her in prison with His angels and healed her. A certain woman, Juliana, upon seeing this, desired martyrdom for herself. Both women were severely tortured and with mockery were led through the city. Their breasts were cut off and much blood flowed from them. They were finally led to the place of execution, where Dioscorus himself slaughtered his daughter, and Juliana was slain by the soldiers. That same day, lightning struck the house of Dioscorus, killing him and Martianus. St. Barbara suffered in the year 306. Her miracle-working relics rest in Kiev. Glorified in the Kingdom of Christ, she appeared many

times even in our own day, sometimes alone and sometimes in the company of the Most-holy Theotokos.

Source: St. Nikolai Velimirovic, The Prologue of Ohrid – Volume Two.

Apolytikion

Let us honor the holy Barbara for, with the aid of the Cross as her weapon, she crushed the snares of the enemy, and was rescued from them like a bird.

Kontakion

O noble Champion, following God who is reverently praised in Trinity, you abandoned the temples of idols. Struggling amid suffering, O Barbara, you were not overwhelmed by the threats of the tyrants, O brave One, even singing aloud, “I worship the Trinity, the one Godhead.”

† Our Righteous Father John of Damascus (760)

This divinely-enlightened Harp of the Spirit was at the same time one of the Church's greatest hymnographers and one of Her greatest theologians and defenders of the Faith.

The city of Damascus in Syria fell to the Muslims in 635. At the time of the Caliph Abdul-Malik, responsibility for government of the Christian population was given to Sergius Mansur, a prominent Christian of the city. This Sergius strove to govern in a godly way under the many disabilities imposed by the Caliph, and devoted his wealth to almsgiving and to ransoming Christian prisoners. His son John was born in 675, and along with his adoptive brother Cosmas (October 14) was brought up to love and serve Christ.

John, whose exceptional education included a perfect knowledge of both Greek and Arabic, entered the civil administration and eventually succeeded to his father's position under the Caliph. When the Emperor Leo the Isaurian began to attack the holy icons, Saint John undertook a spirited defense of the Faith through letters to correspondents throughout the Empire. Normally the Emperor would have killed or exiled the Saint directly, but since he lived in Muslim lands the Emperor could not touch him (an interesting example of Islam unwittingly contributing to the defense of the Christian faith). So the wicked Emperor circulated a forged letter which made it appear that John was plotting against the Caliph. When this letter fell (as planned) into the Caliph's hands, he was furious, and ordered that the Saint's

right hand be cut off. That evening John placed his severed hand before the icon of the Mother of God and prayed with tears that it might be restored. On awaking he found that his hand had been miraculously restored to him. The miracle convinced the Caliph of his counselor's innocence, and John was restored to favor; but now John wanted nothing more of worldly honor and wished only to be a monk. Giving up his position, he distributed his fortune among the poor and left for Jerusalem to become a monk at the Monastery of St Sabas.

The Abbot of the monastery put John under an Elder who ordered him to have nothing to do with philosophy, science, poetry, chanting or reading, but to give himself uncomplainingly to menial tasks so as to advance in humility. This the Saint did. Some time later, however, a monk grieving over his brother's death persuaded John to write a funeral hymn for his consolation. Out of compassion, John wrote the hymn which is used to this day in the Funeral Service. For his disobedience, John was given the job of cleaning all the latrines of the monastery by hand, which, again, he did without complaint. A few days later the Theotokos appeared to the Elder and told him to allow John to compose hymns and poems, which, she told, him, would surpass the Psalms of David in beauty and grace.

Thus the monk John began to write the large body of inspired hymns which grace the Church's services. Among these are the Canon chanted at the Pascha Service, as well as most of the Resurrectional hymns of the Octoechos.

Saint John's poetical gifts were matched by his gifts for expressing the Church's theology: he composed a powerful defense of the icons (in print under the title On the Holy Images), a complete exposition of the Orthodox Faith (On the Orthodox Faith), and the first written refutation of Islam, which he had come to understand well while serving in the Caliph's court.

In old age, John was ordained a priest by the Patriarch of Jerusalem. He reposed in peace in 760 at the age of eighty-four.

Saint Gennadius, Archbishop of Novgorod (1505)

He was of noble birth, but entered monastic life at Valaam. He lived as a hermit on the island of Solovki from 1430 until 1447, when he was appointed abbot of the Chudov Monastery in Moscow. In 1484 he became Bishop of Novgorod. He found that the Tatar invasions had so disrupted the Church that a complete text of the Holy Scriptures could hardly be found in all of Russia. He ordered and oversaw the publication of the first printed Slavonic edition of the Holy Scriptures, set up schools for the instruction of the clergy, re-established order in the divine services, and fought various heresies. His devotion earned him enemies, and he resigned his episcopate to withdraw once again to a monastery. He reposed in peace in 1505.

John the Confessor, Bishop of Polybotus

New Hieromartyr Seraphim, Bishop of the Phanar in Greece

Day 04-Dec-2023 Monday

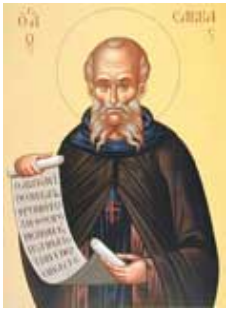
Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 1 Timothy 5:1-10; Luke 17:20-25
5 Do not [sharply] rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father; the younger men as brothers; 2 older women as mothers; the younger as sisters, in all purity.
3 Honor widows who are truly widows.
4But if any widow has children or grand-children, let them first learn how to carry out their religious duty towards their own family, and to repay their parents.
This is good and acceptable in the sight of God.
5 Those who are truly widows and abandoned are the ones who have placed their hope in God and who persevere in petitions and prayers night and day.
6 But those who live in luxury are dead even as they live.
7 Give strict orders regarding these matters, so that they may be without reproach.
8 If anyone does not provide for his own, especially his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever! 9 Only widows who are more than sixty years old and who were married to one man should be enrolled as widows.

Gospel reading:
20 Being asked by the Pharisees when the Kingdom of God would come, Jesus answered them, 'The Kingdom of God does not come with observation! 21Neither will people say, 'Look, here!' or, 'Look, there!' for behold, the Kingdom of God is in your midst.
22 Jesus told the disciples, 'The days will come when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it.
23 People will tell you, 'Look, here!' or 'Look, there!' Do not go away or follow [them], 24 for as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day.
25 But first, he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

Day 05-Dec-2023 Tuesday

Fast Day/ oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

† Our Venerable, Godbearing Father Sabbas the Sanctified (533)



"This Saint was born in 439 in Moutalaska, a small village of Cappadocia. He entered the arena of the monastic life from childhood and was under that master trainer of monastics, Euthymius the Great, the teacher of the desert. He became the spiritual father of many monks and an instructor for the monasteries in Palestine, and was appointed leader (archimandrite) of the desert-dwellers of Palestine by the Patriarch of Jerusalem. In his old age he went to Constantinople, to the Emperors Anastasius and Saint Justinian the Great, in behalf of the Orthodox Faith and the dogmas of the Council of Chalcedon. Having lived ninety-four years, he reposed in 533. The Typicon for the ecclesiastical services had its beginning in the monastery established by this righteous one." (Great Horologion)

St Cosmas the Protos of Mount Athos and his companions (~1274)

"Determined to impose the union of the Churches accepted under pressure at the Council of Lyon (1274) to secure Papal support for the Byzantine Empire, Michael VIII Palaeologos sent troops to Mount Athos, the stronghold of Orthodoxy and centre of opposition to his policy, with orders to take sanguinary measures against monks who would not recognize the false union.

"When the Emperor's soldiers reached Karyes, the capital of Athos, which was organized as a lavra in those days, they seized the Protos of Athos, who had been an example to all of what a steadfast monk should be. They put him to the sword together with many other fathers there, and in their fury ransacked and fired the Church and monastic buildings, leaving rack and ruin behind them. Emerging from the wild places and thick forests where they had taken refuge, the Orthodox monks buried the holy Martyrs at the entrance to the Church of the Protaton. Through the centuries, generations of monks piously lit the lamp each day above the 'tomb of the Protos'; but it was not until 5 December 1981 that his relics were solemnly taken from the earth, and that a service was held in his honour in the presence of a great crowd." (Synaxarion)

Holy Martyr Diogenes

Venerable Martyrs of Karyes

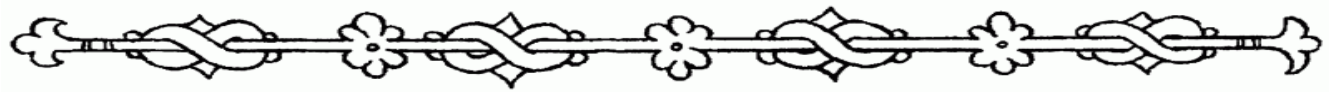
Venerable Nectarius and Philotheus of Mount Athos

Day 05-Dec-2023 Tuesday

Fast Day/ oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.
Readings of the day: 1 Timothy 5:11-21; Luke 17:26-37
11 On the other hand, do not enroll younger widows: when they are overcome by
their sensual inclinations more than by Christ, they desire to marry.
12 They thus fall under condemnation because they have rejected their first pledge
{to remain among the widows}.
13 Besides, they get into the habit of being idle and go about from house to house.
They are not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they
should not.
14 Therefore, I think it best that the younger widows should get married, bear
children and manage their homes; this will give the enemy no opportunity for
slander.
15 For already some have strayed to follow Satan.
16 Believers who have widows among their close relatives should take care of
them.
Do not allow the Church to be burdened so that it might relieve [only] those who
are truly widows.
Guidelines pertaining to presbyters
17 Presbyters who rule well should be accounted worthy of double honor,
especially those who work hard in preaching and teaching.
18 As the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle the ox when it treads out the
grain,'a and, 'The laborer is worthy of his wages.
19 Do not receive an accusation against a presbyter, except at the word of two or
three witnesses.
20 Reprove those who have sinned in the sight of all, so that the others may also
be in fear.
21 I command you in the sight of God and Christ Jesus, and the elect angels:
observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality.

Gospel Reading:
26 As it happened in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man.
27 People ate, drank, got married and were given in marriage, until the day when
Noah entered into the ship; and the flood came, destroying them all.
28 Likewise, even as it happened in the days of Lot: people ate, drank, bought,
sold, planted and built.
29 But in the day that Lot went out from Sodom, it rained fire and sulfur from the

sky which destroyed them all.
30 It will be the same in the day that the Son of Man is revealed.
31 In that day, whoever is on the housetop, [having] his goods in the house, should not go down to take them away! Likewise, whoever is in the field should not return.
32 Remember Lot's wife! 33 Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it.
34 I tell you that in that night, there will be two people in one bed! One will be taken, and the other will be left.
35 There will be two grinding grain together.
One will be taken, and the other will be left.
36 Two will be in the field: one will be taken, and the other left.
37 In reply, the disciples asked him, 'Where, Lord?' He said to them, 'Where the body is, there the eagles will also be assembled.
a



Day 06-Dec-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Our Father among the Saints Nicholas the Wonderworker, Archbishop of Myra (345)

Our beloved holy Father Nicholas is, along with St George (and second to the All-holy Theotokos), probably the best-loved Saint of the Church. His numberless miracles through the ages, on behalf of the countless Christians who have called on him, cannot be told.

He was born in Lycia (in Asia Minor) around the end of the third century, to pious Christian parents. His love of virtue, and his zeal for observing the canons of the Church, were evident from his infancy, when he would abstain from his mother's breast every Wednesday and Friday until the evening. From early youth he was inclined to solitude and silence; in fact, not a single written or spoken word of the Saint has come down to us. Though ordained a priest by his uncle, Archbishop Nicholas, he attempted to withdraw to a hermit's life in the Holy Land; but he was told by revelation that he was to return home to serve the Church publicly and be the salvation of many souls.

When his parents died, he gave away all of his inheritance to the needy, and thereafter almsgiving was his greatest glory. He always took particular care that his charity be done in secret. Perhaps the most famous story of his open-handedness concerns a debt-ridden man who had no money to provide dowries for his daughters, or even to support them, and in despair had resolved to give them into prostitution. On three successive nights the Saint threw a bag of gold into the window of the man's house, saving him and his daughters from sin and hopelessness. The man searched relentlessly to find and thank his benefactor; when at last he discovered that it was Nicholas, the Saint made him promise not to reveal the good deed until after he had died. (This story may be the thin thread that connects the Saint with the modern-day Santa Claus).

God honored his faithfulness by granting him unparalleled gifts of healing and wonderworking. Several times he calmed storms by his prayers and saved the ship that he was sailing in. Through the centuries he has often done

the same for sailors who call out to him, and is considered the patron of sailors and all who go to sea.

He was elected Bishop of Myra not long before the great persecutions under Diocletian and Maximian (c. 305), and was put in prison, from which he continued to encourage his flock in the Faith. When the Arian heresy wracked the Church not long after Constantine came to the throne, St Nicholas was one of the 318 Bishops who gathered in Nicea in 325. There he was so incensed at the blasphemies of Arius that he struck him on the face. This put the other bishops in a quandary, since the canons require that any hierarch who strikes anyone must be deposed. Sadly, they prepared to depose the holy Nicholas; but in the night the Lord Jesus and the most Holy Theotokos appeared to them, telling them that the Saint had acted solely out of love for Truth, not from hatred or passion, and that they should not act against him.

While still in the flesh, he sometimes miraculously appeared in distant places to save the lives of the faithful. He once saved the city of Myra from famine by appearing to the captain of a ship full of grain, telling him to take his cargo to the city. He appeared in a dream to Constantine to intercede for the lives of three Roman officers who had been falsely condemned; the three grateful soldiers later became monks.

The holy bishop reposed in peace around 345. His holy relics were placed in a church built in his honor in Myra, where they were venerated by throngs of pilgrims every year. In 1087, after Myra was conquered by the Saracens, the Saint's relics were translated to Bari in southern Italy, where they are venerated today. Every year, quantities of fragrant myrrh are gathered from the casket containing his holy relics.

Apolytikion

A model of faith and the image of gentleness, the example of your life has shown you forth to your sheep-fold to be a master of temperance. You obtained thus through being lowly, gifts from on high, and riches through poverty. Nicholas, our father and priest of priests, intercede with Christ our God that He may save our souls.

Kontakion

Saintly One, [St. Nicholas] in Myra you proved yourself a priest; for in fulfilling the Gospel of Christ, venerable One, you laid down your life for your people and saved the innocent from death. For this you were sanctified as One learned in divine grace.

New Martyr Nicolas Karamos of Smyrna (1657)

He was a Christian living in Smyrna under Ottoman rule. One day he lost his temper in an argument and exclaimed that he would "turn Turk" before he

would give way in the dispute. Immediately, some Turks watching the argument seized Nicolas and brought him before the judge to honor his promise. Nicolas, who had come to his senses, declared 'If it please God, I will never deny my Lord Jesus Christ, the true God who will come to judge the living and the dead.' The judge had the humble confessor flogged and tortured through thirty-six days, but he remained firm in his confession of Christ, despite even the tears of his mother and his wife. Finally, the judge had him hanged on March 19 1657. His torments and faithfulness were seen by some Western visitors; so moved were they that they recovered his body from the sea (where it had been cast after hanging) and took it to Europe.

St Maximus, Metropolitan of Kiev & Vladimir (1305)

He was one of the bold Confessors who opposed the false Union of Lyons perpetrated by the Emperor Michael VIII in 1274. In 1283 he became Metropolitan of Kiev (and thus of the whole Russian Church). At that time the Principality of Kiev had been reduced to ruins by the Tatar invaders. Saint Maximus received a revelation from God that he should transfer the metropolitanate from Kiev to Vladimir. On the night following the move to Vladimir, the Most Holy Theotokos appeared to the Saint, saying 'You have done well, Maximus my servant, in coming to live in my city!' She then put a mantle on his shoulders which he found when he awoke.

Saint Maximus reposed in peace in 1305. His body, interred in the Cathedral of Vladimir, was found to be incorrupt in the nineteenth century.

Saint Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch

Day 06-Dec-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 1 Timothy 5:22-6:11; Luke 18:15-17, 26-30
22 Do not lay your hands hastily on anyone and do not be a participant in someone else's sins.
23 Do not drink only water but use a little wine for your stomach and because of your frequent illnesses.
24 The sins of some people are obvious long before they come to judgment while others are discovered only later.
25 Likewise, good works are obvious, and even those that are not cannot remain hidden.
6 Those who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of all honor, so that God's Name and our doctrine may not be brought into disrepute.
2 Slaves whose masters are believers should not despise them because they are brethren.
Rather, they should them serve them because those who have a share in the benefit [of their work] are believing and beloved.
Teach and exhort these things.
3 If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ and with the doctrine of godliness, 4 such a person is conceited, ignorant, obsessed with arguments, controversies and disputes over words.
These things result in envy, conflict, insults, evil suspicions, 5 and constant antagonism between people whose minds are corrupt and devoid of truth, (people who treat religion as a means of gain).
6 Godliness, in fact, brings great gain if one is content.
7 Indeed, we brought nothing into the world, and we certainly cannot carry anything out!
8 But if we have food and clothing, let us be content with that.
9 Those who are determined to become rich fall into a temptation and a snare with many senseless and harmful lusts which plunge them into ruin and destruction.
10 Truly, the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.
Some have been led astray from the faith in their greed and they have pierced themselves with many sorrows.
11 But you, man of God, flee these things! Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and gentleness.

Gospel Reading:
15 People were also bringing their infants to him, so that Jesus might lay hands on them.
But when the disciples saw this, they rebuked them.
16 Jesus summoned his disciples and told them, 'Allow the little children to come to me, and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.
17 Amen, I tell you: whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child will in no way enter into it.
26 Those who heard this exclaimed, 'Then, who can be saved?'
27 But Jesus replied, 'The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.
28 Peter said, 'Look, we have left everything and followed you!'
29 And Jesus said to them, 'Amen, I tell you: there is no one who has left house, or wife, or brothers, or parents, or children, for the sake of the Kingdom of God,
30 who will not receive many times more in this [present] time, and in the age to come, eternal life.

Day 07-Dec-2023 Thursday

Fast Day/ oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Our Father among the Saints Ambrose, Bishop of Milan (397)

This illustrious light of Orthodoxy in the Western Church was born in Gaul in 349, but his widowed mother took the family to Rome while he was still a small child. Brilliant and well-educated, he was made a provincial Governor in 375 and took up residence in Milan. In those days, the Arian heresy was still dividing the Church, despite its repudiation at the Council of Nicaea in 325. When the time came to elect a new Bishop in Milan, the Orthodox and Arian parties were so divided that they could come to no agreement on a new Bishop. When Ambrose came as Governor to try to restore peace and order, a young child, divinely inspired, called out "Ambrose, Bishop!" To Ambrose's amazement, the people took up the cry, and Ambrose himself was elected, though he tried to refuse, protesting that he was only a catechumen (it was still common in those days to delay Holy Baptism for fear of polluting it by sin). He even attempted to flee, but his horse brought him back to the city. Resigning himself to God's will, he was baptized and, only a week later, elevated to Bishop. Immediately, he renounced all possessions, distributed all of his money to the poor and gave his estates to the Church. Straightaway, he entered into a spirited defense of Orthodoxy in his preaching and writings to the dismay of the Arians who had supported his election. Soon he persuaded Gratian, Emperor of the West, to call the Council of Aquilea, which brought an end to Arianism in the Western Church. (Arianism, however, continued to prosper among the barbarian nations for many years; see the Martyrs of Africa, also commemorated today).

Several times the holy Bishop was called upon to defend the Church against domination by the secular powers. Once, putting down an uprising in Thessalonika, the Emperor Theodosius punished the city by ordering the massacre of thousands of its residents. When the Emperor later visited Milan and came to the Cathedral to attend the Liturgy, Saint Ambrose stopped him at the door, condemned his crime before all the people, forbade him entrance to the church and excommunicated him for eight months. The Emperor went

away weeping, and submitted in humility to the Church's discipline. When he returned after long penance to be restored to Communion, he went into the sanctuary along with the clergy, as had been the custom of the Emperors since Constantine the Great. But again the holy Ambrose humbled him in the sight of all the people, saying "Get out and take your place among the laity; the purple does not make priests, but only emperors." Theodosius left without protest, took his place among the penitents, and never again attempted to enter the sanctuary of a church. (When the Emperor died, it was Bishop Ambrose who preached his funeral eulogy).

Saint Ambrose, by teaching, preaching and writing, brought countless pagans to the Faith. His most famous convert was St Augustine (June 15), who became his disciple and eventually a bishop. Ambrose's many theological and catechetical works helped greatly to spread the teaching of the Greek fathers in the Latin world. He wrote many glorious antiphonal hymns which were once some of the gems of the Latin services.

Saint Ambrose reposed in peace in 397; his relics still rest in the basilica in Milan.

Kontakion

Flashing lightning-like with godly doctrines, thou, O Ambrose, dravest off the darkness of the impious error of Arius; and working wonders and signs by the Spirit’s might, thou, O good shepherd, didst heal divers sufferings. Righteous Father, thou initiate of sacred mysteries, entreat Christ God to grant great mercy unto us.

The Martyrs of Africa, who suffered during the Vandal persecution (429 and following)

In the year 429, eighty thousand Vandals crossed from Spain into Africa and, in the course of ten years of massacre and pillage, gained control of most of the Roman territories of North Africa. Many people picture these barbarians as pagans, but they were in fact Arian heretics, who under their leader Genseric began a fierce persecution of the Church wherever they encountered it. The tortures that many thousands endured in their confession of the Faith are too horrible to describe here; the clergy were singled out for special cruelty.

Today we especially commemorate the Orthodox faithful whom the Vandals burned to death in their church, who went on singing hymns and praising God until the moment of their death. We also commemorate the three hundred Martyrs in Carthage who died by the sword rather than submit to Arian baptism.

The death of Genseric in 454 brought little relief, for after a short hiatus his successors Huneric (477-484) and Gonthamund (484-497) continued the persecution as viciously as before. Christian Africa lived under the Vandal

yoke for almost 100 years: freedom from persecution was not secure until Justinian's forces overcame and drove off the Vandals in 523-525. The African Church, once a beacon of Christianity, never recovered its former vitality.

Our Venerable Father Antony of Siya (1556)

Saint Anthony is one of the holy protectors of iconographers.

He was born in 1477 in a Russian village near Archangel. From an early age he devoted himself to reading sacred books and making icons. When his parents died, he entered the service of a wealthy lord in Novgorod, and later married the lord's daughter. But less than a year after his marriage he was widowed. Despairing of earthly consolations, he gave his wealth to the poor and, owning only the clothes that he wore, went to become a monk at the Monastery of St Pachomius. There he excelled in prayer, vigil and ascesis, praying for most of the night, taking on the heaviest work by day, and eating only every second day. After a short time he was ordained to the priesthood.

Some years later he and two companions, seeking a more secluded life for prayer, traveled to the frigid shores of the White Sea and established a small monastic brotherhood where the River Siya enters Lake Mikhailov. They lived in utter poverty, staying alive by gathering mushrooms and wild berries. Many times they heard the sound of bells, though there was no church or habitation anywhere nearby. In time other brethren were attracted to the site, and a monastery was founded with the help of the Grand Prince of Moscow. When the monastery church burned down, an icon of the Holy Trinity painted by St Antony miraculously survived unscathed, and later worked many miracles. The Saint himself withdrew into the forests, living alone for many years until he was called back by his spiritual children to serve as the monastery's abbot. Having foreseen his own end, he reposed in peace in 1556. He asked that his body be thrown into the lake, but his disciples, obedient in every other way, did not fulfil his request. His tomb was the source of many miracles in the coming years.

Philothea of Arges

St. Philothea was born in the Bulgarian capital of Trnovo. Her mother died when she was still young, and her father remarried. One of St. Philothea's tasks was to bring her father his food as he worked in the fields. Each day, she would give some of it to poor children. When her father found out, he became enraged and struck her with an axe. Although he was immediately repentant, his daughter died from the wound. Her father was unable to move her body, so he confessed his sin and begged assistance from the Archbishop of Trnovo. The archbishop and his priests were likewise unable to move the body. Realizing the martyr did not want to remain in her native country, the archbishop began listing monasteries and churches. When he reached the name of the Monastery of Curtea de Arges, Romania, St. Philothea's body became light. Her relics were taken by clerical procession to that monastery, where they remain today, effecting miraculous cures.

Venerable Gregory the Hesychast on Mount Athos
Venerable Nilus of Stolbensk
Athenodorus the Martyr of Mesopotamia
Venerable Paul the Obedient
Venerable Bassa of Jerusalem

Day 07-Dec-2023 Thursday

Fast Day/ oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.
Readings of the day: 1 Timothy 6:17-21; Luke 18:31-34
17 Instruct those who are rich in this present world that they should not be proud or place their hope on uncertain riches but on the living God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.
18 Teach them to do good, to be rich in good works, ready to distribute and willing to share.
19 In this way they will store up for themselves a good foundation for the future and take hold of eternal life.
20 Timothy, guard what has been committed to you! Turn away from worldly and empty discussions as well as from the contradiction of the (falsely) so-called knowledge.
21 Those who have embraced this have wandered from the faith! Grace be with you! Amen.

Gospel Reading:
31 He took the Twelve aside, and said to them, 'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all the things that are written through the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be fulfilled.
32 For he will be delivered to the Gentiles, mocked, mistreated, and spit upon.
33 Having flogged him, they will kill him, and on the third day, he will rise again.
34 However, they understood none of these things.
What Jesus was saying was concealed from them, and they did not understand the things that were said.

Day 08-Dec-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Our Venerable Father Patapius (6th or 7th c.)

He was born at Thebes in Egypt, and at a young age left his pious parents, his inheritance and his acquaintances to dwell in the Egyptian desert, devoting himself to ceaseless prayer. After many years, he reputation spread and, despite his desire for solitude, throngs of pilgrims would seek him out for his prayers and counsel. To escape the attentions of men, he did a surprising thing: he abandoned the desert and moved to Constantinople, settling in the Blachernae district, where, amid the bustle of the city, he was able to pass unnoticed, more secure in his solitude than he had been in the caves of Egypt.

As he grew in obedience to the commandments of Christ, the grace of working miracles grew in him, and once again he gradually became known. Once a blind man cast himself before Patapius on the street, and the Saint cured him instantly by calling on the name of Christ. Once he healed a man crippled by dropsy, anointing him with the oil from a vigil lamp and signing him with the Cross.

After blessing the Church for many years with his prayers and miracles, St Patapius fell asleep in peace, and was buried in the church of the Monastery of the Egyptians near Constantinople. In 1904 his precious and incorrupt relics were uncovered in the course of some building at a small monastery near Corinth. From that time the monastery has been dedicated to St Patapius, and many miracles are worked there.

Holy Apostles Sosthenes, Apollos, Tychicus and Epaphroditus, Cephas and Caesar

All of these Apostles are mentioned in the New Testament. Sosthenes was the ruler of the Synagogue in Corinth, and was converted through the preaching of St Paul. After traveling with St Paul for years, he became Bishop of Colophon near Ephesus. Apollos was a Jew from Alexandria, well educated and with a deep knowledge of the Scriptures. He was brought to the fulness of the Christian faith by Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus, and went out preaching the Gospel among the pagans. His eloquence was so admired that for awhile the gentile Church divided into two factions, one for Paul and one for Apollos. Saint Apollos later became Bishop of Caesarea.

(The Synaxarion lists Cephas and Caesar here; but some believe that St Paul's reference to Cephas in 1 Cor 1:12 refers to the Apostle Peter, not to a separate companion of St Paul; and that "those of Caesar's household" (Phil.

4:22) refers to Christians in the Emperor's palace in Rome, not to a Christian named Caesar.)

Sophronius, Bishop of Cyprus

Venerable Cyril of Mount Chelma

Day 08-Dec-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 2 Timothy 1:1, 2, 8-18; Luke 19:12-28
Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus, 2 to Timothy, a beloved son: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.
8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God,
9 who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, 10 but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,
11 to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.
12 For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day. 13 Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.
14 That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. 15 This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes.
16 The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain; 17 but when he arrived in Rome, he sought me out very zealously and found me.
18 The Lord grant to him that he may find mercy from the Lord in that Day – and you know very well how many ways he ministered to me at Ephesus.
Gospel reading:

12 He said therefore, 'A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive a kingdom for himself, and then return.
13 So he called ten of his slaves gave them ten mina coins, and told them, 'Do business [with these] until I come.
14 But his subjects hated him, and they sent a delegation after him, to say: 'We do not want this man to reign over us.
15 It so happened that when he returned after receiving the kingdom, that he commanded these servants to whom he had given the money to be called to him, so that he might know what they had earned by conducting business.

16 The first came before him, saying: 'Lord, your mina has made ten more minas!'
17 The king said to him, 'Well done, you good servant! Because you were found faithful with very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.
18 The second came, saying: 'Your mina, Lord, has made five minas!' 19 And so, the king said to him, 'And you are to be set over five cities.
20 Another came, saying: 'Lord, behold, your mina, which I kept laid away in a piece of cloth.
2I was afraid of you, because you are a strict man! You take up what you did not lay down, and you reap what you did not sow.
22 The king said to him, 'Out of your own mouth will I judge you, you wicked servant! You perceived that I was a severe man, taking up what I did not lay down, and reaping what I did not sow.
23 Why then did you not place my money on deposit, and at my coming, I would have collected it with interest on it?' 24 He then said to those who stood by, 'Take the mina away from him, and give it to the one who has the ten minas.
25 At this, they said to the master,a 'Lord, he [already] has ten minas!' 26 'For I tell you that to everyone who [already] has, more will be given; but from the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.
27 As for those enemies of mine who did not want me to reign over them here, bring them here and kill them before me.
' The Entrance into Jerusalem 28 Having said these things, Jesus went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

Day 09-Dec-2023 Saturday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

The Conception of the Most Holy Mother of God

"In accordance with the eternal purpose of God, who willed to prepare a most pure habitation for Himself in order to take flesh and dwell among men, Joachim and Anna were prevented from having children for many years. Their barren old age was symbolic of human nature itself, bowed down and dried up under the weight of sin and death, yet they never ceased begging God to take away their reproach. Now when the time of preparation determined by the Lord had been fulfilled, God sent an Angel to Joachim in solitude on a mountain, and to Anna in her affliction weeping in her garden, to tell them that the ancient prophecies were soon to be fulfilled in them: a child would be born to them, who was destined to become the veritable Ark of the new Covenant, the divine Ladder, the unburnt Bush, the living Temple where the Word of God would take up his abode. Through the conception of Saint Anna, the barrenness of human nature itself, separated from God by death, has on this day been brought to an end; and by the wondrous birth-giving of her who had remained childless until the age when women can no longer bear fruit, God announced and testified to the more astonishing miracle of the Conception without seed, and of the immaculate coming to birth of Christ within the heart and the womb of the Most Holy Virgin and Mother of God.

"Even though the birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary took place through a miraculous action of God, she was conceived by the union of man and woman in accordance with the laws of our human nature, which has fallen through Adam's transgression and become subject to sin and corruption (cf. Gen. 3:16). As the chosen Vessel and precious Shrine prepared by God since the beginning of time, she is indeed the most pure and the most perfect of mankind, but even so, she has not been set apart from our common inheritance nor from the consequences of the sin of our first parents. Just as it was fitting that Christ, in order to deliver us from death by his own voluntary death (Heb. 2:14), should by His Incarnation be made like to men in all things

except sin; so it was meet that His Mother, in whose womb the Word of God would unite with human nature, should be subject to death and corruption like every child of Adam, lest we not be fully included in Salvation and Redemption. The Mother of God has been chosen and preferred among all women, not arbitrarily, but because God foresaw that she would preserve her purity and keep it perfect: conceived and born like all of us, she has been worthy to become the Mother of the Son of God and the mother of us all. So, in her tenderness and compassion, she is able to intercede for us with her Son, that He may have mercy upon us.

"Just as the Lord Jesus Christ was the fruit of the virginity of the holy Mother of God, so she herself was the fruit of the chastity of Joachim and Anna. And by following the same path of chastity we too, monks and Christian married people, can bring Christ to be born and grow in us." (Synaxarion)

In the Latin church, this day is called the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, reflecting the erroneous Latin view of the conception of the Holy Theotokos.

"The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception proclaimed by the Roman Catholics in 1858 is rejected by the Orthodox Church, but without in any way detracting from the dignity of the Mother of God. In fact, according to the Fathers, the inheritance from Adam consists not in a personal responsibility of all men for original sin, but simply in the inheritance of the consequences of sin: death, corruption and the passions (including procreation and fleshly union). Hence the Orthodox have no difficulty in recognizing that the Mother of God was heir, like us, of all the consequences of Adam's sin — Christ alone was exempt — but at the same time pure and without personal sin, for she freely kept herself from all attraction for the world and for the passions, and she voluntarily co-operated in God's purpose by obeying His will with docility: Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word, she replied to the Angel Gabriel (Luke 1:38)" (Synaxarion)

Apolytikion

Against all hope, the bonds of barrenness are loosed today. For, God has hearkened unto Joachim and Anna clearly promising that they would bear a godly maiden. He who commanded the angel to cry out to her, 'Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you,' will be born of her, the infinite One Himself, becoming man.

St Hannah (Anna), the Prophetess, the mother of the Prophet Samuel (12th c. BC)

Her story opens the First Book of Samuel. Though barren, she kept all the commandments and prayed with fervor that her reproach might be taken from her, vowing that if God granted her a son she would dedicate him to God's service. When her prayers were answered, she brought her child Samuel to live with Eli the High Priest as soon as he was weaned. Her beautiful song of praise and thanks (1 Sam. 2:1-10) has become the third Biblical Ode of the

Matins Canon; today it is only sung in full in monasteries during Lent. Despite her age, God granted her three sons and two daughters. She reposed in peace.

St Stephen the New Light (Neolampes) of Constantinople (912)

He seems to have lived in Constantinople for his entire life, but lived there as if in the desert, devoting himself entirely to solitude, fasting and prayer. For most of his adult life he ate only a few vegetables without salt once or twice a week; by his prayers many miracles were wrought in the City.

In time he was made a priest and served in the church of St Antipas, where he lived in seclusion. When the church was destroyed in the earthquake of 879, he withdrew to a dank pit in the ruins where the air was so unwholesome that he lost his hair and teeth and was almost paralyzed. He only emerged from this ascesis after twelve years. Thereafter he served the Divine Liturgy only on Feasts of the Lord, allowing himself some water and fruit after the service; otherwise he spent his time alone in silent prayer. He reposed in peace in 912 at the age of seventy-three.

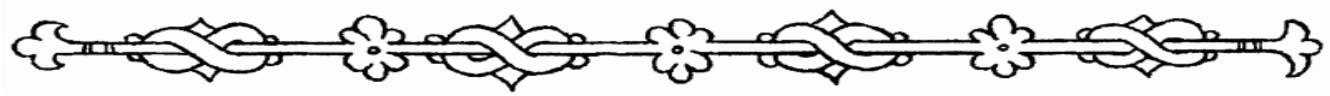
Dedication of the Church of the Resurrection

Day 09-Dec-2023 Saturday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.
Readings of the day: Galatians 5:22-6:2; Luke 10:19-21
22 On the other hand, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith,a 23 gentleness, and self-control.
Against such things there is no law! 24 Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and lusts.
25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit! 26 Let us not become arrogant, challenging and envying one another.
6 Brethren, even if someone is caught in some fault, you who are spiritual must restore such a person in a spirit of gentleness.
But watch out for yourself in order not to be tempted.
2Bear each others' burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ.

Gospel Reading:

19 Behold, I give you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy.
Nothing will in any way hurt you.
20 Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you; but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.
21 In that same hour, Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, 'I confess you, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.
Yes, Father, for doing so was well-pleasing in your sight.



Day 10-Dec-2023 Sunday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Holy Martyrs Menas, Hermogenes and Eugraphus (235)

Menas was an Athenian, a courtier of the Emperor Maximinus, and a secret Christian. Once there was an outbreak of civil unrest in Alexandria, brought about by various political factions, and by the increasing success of Christian missionaries in turning the Alexandrian people from the idols. The Emperor sent Menas to reconcile the parties and settle the dispute. On his arrival, Menas quickly resolved the political troubles and restored peace to the city; but instead of putting down Christianity as the Emperor had desired, he did everything in his power to protect the Christians and encourage the spread of the Gospel. When word of this came to the Emperor, he sent another trusted courtier, Hermogenes, to re-establish Imperial authority and to execute Menas if he would not renounce Christ. Hermogenes followed these orders scrupulously: he subjected the godly Menas to various horrid tortures in the public arena. But Menas was miraculously preserved through them all, and when he finally appeared in the arena, flanked by two shining Angels, Hermogenes repented and confessed Christ. He in turn became such a fervent advocate for the Gospel that he was soon made a Bishop (!). Finally the Emperor decided that the only solution was to come to Alexandria himself. There he had both Menas and Hermogenes cruelly tortured to death in secret, lest they perform any public miracles; but when the Emperor presented himself before the people at the arena the following day, the two Saints, miraculously preserved, appeared there also, causing the people to cry out "Christ is the only true God!" At the sight, Menas' scribe Eugraphus declared himself a Christian, leaped into the arena and publicly demanded the honor of dying with them. All three were beheaded. Their precious relics were later taken to Constantinople, where they worked many miracles.

Holy Martyr Gemellus

Venerable Thomas Defourkinos of Bithynia

Saint John Brancovich, King of Serbia, and his Parents Stephen and Angelina

Joasaph, Bishop of Belgorod

Day 10-Dec-2023 Sunday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

The Woman with the Spirit of Infirmity
Ephesians 6:10-17; Luke 13:10-17
The armor of God 10 Finally, be strong in the Lord, with the strength of his power.
11 Put on the complete armor of God, so that you may be able to resist the devil's tactics.
12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the principalities, powers, against the world-rulerse of this darkness and against the evil spiritual forces of the supernatural realms.
f 13 Therefore, put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to resist when the evil day comes.
Having accomplished all things, may you stand your ground! 14 Yes, stand [firm], having the belt of truth around your waist, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 having fitted shoes on your feet so as to be ready in the Good News of peace.
16 Above all, take up the shield of faith which will enable you to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one.
17 Take also the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit which is what God has said.

Gospel Reading: The Woman with the Spirit of Infirmity

10 Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath day.
11 Behold, there was a woman who had had a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years.
She was bent over and could not straighten herself up.
12 When Jesus saw her, he called her, and said to her, 'Woman, you are freed from your infirmity!' 13 He laid his hands on her and

immediately, she stood up straight and glorified God.
14 However, the ruler of the synagogue was indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath.
He said to the crowd, 'There are six days in which people should work! Therefore, come on those days and be healed, not on the Sabbath day!' 15 Then, the Lord answered him, 'You hypocrites! Does not each one of you free his ox or his donkey from the stall on the Sabbath, and lead it out to water? 16 Should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham who was bound by Satan for eighteen years, be freed from this bondage on the Sabbath day?' 17 As he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame and all the people rejoiced over all the glorious things that were done by him.

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING
Today’s Gospel reading gives us a small picture of the work of God in Jesus Christ to save the world.
The woman at the centre of the story is suffering from 'a disabling spirit", and has done so for eighteen years.
We are not to see this as a case of demonic possession, although the Lord speaks of her as one 'bound by Satan".
For most of the time the work of evil in this world comes in a less spectacular fashion.
The devil, as his description in Greek (διάβολος) suggests, usually works insidiously by promoting disorder and chaos, by pulling apart the harmonious structure that God has instilled in the world.
In this story we hear that the woman is 'bent over and quite unable to straighten herself.
' She presents an imperfect image of what it is to be human, for as St Gregory of Nyssa tells us in his work On the Creation of Humankind, the upright stance of human beings, our reaching towards the heavens and our forward gaze reflect the royal dignity that God has given us in making us in his image.
These features mark us out from the rest of the animal kingdom, and also enable us to use our forelimbs as hands to engage in the uniquely human vocation of art – the reshaping of the world and offering it back to God.
The woman, doubled over as she is, thus becomes an icon of our fallen state.
In her we see also ourselves, unable to look up, to rise to the dignity of our first creation, to present to the world the undistorted image of God.
But, as we will hear very shortly in the hymn (Apolytikion) for the Forefeast of Christmas, 'Christ is born to raise up his image which had fallen.
' His word and his touch free her from her disability, and restored to the dignity of uprightness she gives glory to God.
And she is no longer referred to simply by her human nature.
From being 'a woman" she becomes, in the Lord’s defence of his actions, 'a daughter of Abraham".

In her not only is the fallen image raised up, but also, she is recognised as a member of the people of God, an inheritor of the covenant made by him to bless the whole world through the descendants of his chosen friend.
Seeing the story in this light we understand more clearly why Jesus should rebuke the president of the synagogue who objects to what has been done.
Here on the Sabbath day, the day which celebrates God’s work of creation and his delight in the 'very good" cosmos that he has made, how can it be other than appropriate for there to be a renewal or restoration of any element of that cosmos.
It may cause a disruption or disturbance to the appearance of order in the meeting place, but appearance of order is precisely only an appearance.
It represents here a certain satisfaction with the truncated state of fallen humanity, and in that sense a collusion with the destructive activity of evil which God in Christ has come to abolish.
Of course, there are other days on which healings can be performed, but here and now is the best time for the work of God to be revealed, and in this woman the right place for the renewal of creation to be set forth.
As we move towards the feasts of the Divine Humanity (Christmas and the Circumcision) may it be that the Lord finds in us, too, the place in which his image may be fully revealed once more.
Amen.

Day 11-Dec-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Our Venerable Father Daniel the Stylite (490)

He was from Samosata in Mesopotamia, and became a monk at the age of twelve. As a young monk he visited St Symeon the Stylite (September 1) to receive his blessing. Years later he moved to the neighborhood of Constantinople at the request of the holy Patriarch Anatolius (July 3), whom he had healed of a deadly ailment through his prayers. For a time Daniel lived in the church of the Archangel Michael at Anaplus, but nine years later St Symeon the Stylite appeared to him in a vision and told him to imitate Symeon's ascesis of living on a pillar. For the remaining thirty-three years of his life the Saint did just that. He stood immovably in prayer regardless of the weather: once after a storm his disciples found him standing covered with ice. He was much loved by several Emperors (including Leo the Great), who sought him out for counsel. He reposed at the age of eighty-four, having lived through the reigns of three Emperors.

Saint Nikon the Dry of the Kiev Caves (1101)

He was a monk in Kiev, taken into slavery by a band of Polovtsi (Turkic raiders who were troubling the country at that time) along with the holy Martyr Eustratius (March 28). He humbly refused to be ransomed by his family and therefore suffered a harsh captivity for three years. Despite this, he prayed constantly for his captors, worked miracles for their sake, and once healed their leader from a deadly illness. One day St Eustratius appeared to him in a vision and told him that he would be set free in three days. When he told his captors, they severed the tendons of his knees and ankles and kept him under guard. But at the appointed time he was miraculously transported to Kiev, where he suddenly appeared in church among his astonished brethren. The Saint did not want his chains removed until his Abbot said "Brother, if the Lord wanted to see you in these chains, he would not have delivered you from captivity!" He was so withered from his hardships that he became known as Nikon the Dry. Later, the captor whom he had healed came to the Monastery of the Caves and became a disciple of his former slave.

Our Venerable Father Luke the New Stylite (979)

He was an Anatolian, and in his youth served in the Byzantine army in the war against the Bulgar Tsar Symeon. After the war, he left the army to become a

monk, and was in time ordained to the priesthood. For a time he served as an army chaplain, living even more austerely than he had as a monk and distributing all his possessions to soldiers in need.

He entered the Monastery of St Zacharias on Mount Olympus in Bithynia, where he was appointed steward. Here his ascetical labors reached new levels. He kept a large stone in his mouth so that he would be unable to speak, and spent each night in a tree. When his exploits threatened to attract admiration, Luke fled to his homeland and lived for a few years in an isolated cave. Then, following in the footsteps of Symeon the Elder (September 1), Symeon the Younger (May 24), Daniel (today) and Alypius (November 26), he began to live as a stylite, dwelling on a tall pillar near Constantinople. Here he became a powerful intercessor for those who flocked to him for healing or counsel, and countless miracles were worked through his prayers.

Saint Luke lived on his pillar for more than forty years without interruption, and fell asleep in peace, aged more than one hundred. He was buried in the Monastery of St Bassian.

Holy Martyr Mirax

Venerable Leontius of Achaia

Day 11-Dec-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 2 Timothy 2:20-26; Luke 19:37-44
20 Now, in a large house, there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay.
Some are for an honorable use and some for a dishonorable use.
21Therefore, if anyone purges himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and suitable for the master's use, prepared for every good work.
22 Flee from youthful lusts! Pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.
23 Reject foolish and ignorant questionings because you know that they result in conflict.
24 The Lord's servant must not be argumentative but gentle towards all, able to teach and patient! 25 In gentleness, he should correct those who oppose him: perhaps God will give them the repentance that leads to a full knowledge of the truth.
26 Thus, they may return to their senses and escape the snare of the devil (who had taken them captive to his will).

Gospel Reading:
37 As Jesus was now approaching, at the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the deeds of power which they had seen.
38 [They were] saying, 'Blessed is he who is coming, a King in the Name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest!' 39 And from the multitude, some of the Pharisees said to Jesus, 'Teacher, rebuke your disciples!' 40 But he answered them, 'I tell you that if these were silent, the stones would cry out!' The Lord weeps over Jerusalem 41 As Jesus was drawing near, he saw the city and began to weep over it, 42 saying, 'If you, even you, had today recognized what is for your peace! But now, those things are hidden from your eyes! 43 For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will throw up a fortification against you, surround you, and hem you in on every side.
44 They will crush you and your children within you to the ground.
They will not leave in you one stone [standing] on another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.

Day 12-Dec-2023 Tuesday

Fast Day/ oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

St Herman, Wonderworker of Alaska (1836)

He is also commemorated tomorrow, December 13. See his life there.

† Our Holy Godbearing Father Spyridon the Wonderworker (348).

He was a humble shepherd who lived on the island of Cyprus with his wife and his one child, a daughter named Irene. Though he was poor himself, his house and table were always open to travelers and those in need. He kept his money in a box which he left open and available to all, not concerning himself with who took from it or whether they were deserving or not. In time, his wife died and, with less worldly cares, he redoubled his prayers and his almsgiving.

He became so well-loved on the island that, when the bishop of the town of Tremithos died, the faithful unanimously chose Spyridon to succeed him, and he thus became a shepherd of rational sheep as well as the beasts he had tended. Despite his sudden elevation in rank, he kept to his former manner of life, traveling everywhere on foot, tending his animals as before, while fulfilling all the duties of a bishop as well. (To portray this godly humility, his icon shows him wearing bishop's vestments and a peasant's woven straw hat.)

His compassion for others was boundless. Though he was very strict with himself, he would always break a fast to give comfort to a traveler. Once a band of robbers broke into his sheepfold by night, but found themselves confined there by an invisible force. When Spyridon found them in the morning, he freed them, admonished them to live honestly, and gave them two sheep in compensation, he said, for their keeping an all-night vigil.

Pages could be filled with stories of the miracles wrought by the holy bishop for the good of his flock: by his prayers he ended a drought, turned a snake to gold to help a poor man, and even raised the dead son of a poor widow. His radiant virtue touched the consciences of those he met so that many would spontaneously fall at his feet and confess their sins.

When the Emperor Constantine summoned the First Ecumenical Council in 325, Spyridon attended, dressed in his simple peasant's garb. At one of the sessions, a proud Arian philosopher challenged the Orthodox to a debate about the Holy Trinity, and was amazed when the simple Spyridon stepped forward to accept the challenge. He and all the other bishops were far more

amazed when the uneducated peasant bishop confounded all the Arian's arguments with his eloquent, Spirit-inspired words. The humbled philosopher admitted that he was convinced, embraced the Orthodox faith, and called upon the other Arians to abandon their human wisdom and embrace the true and life-giving Faith.

The holy bishop always celebrated the Divine Liturgy with joy. Once, serving in a remote, almost empty church, he turned to the invisible congregation and said "Peace be unto all!", and his disciple heard a choir of angels respond "And with thy spirit!"

Saint Spyridon reposed in peace in 348 at the age of seventy-eight. His incorrupt and wonder-working relics poured forth miracles for the people of Cyprus until the seventh century, when they were moved to Constantinople to escape the Arab invasion; when the City fell to the Turks, the relics were again moved to Corfu, where they are venerated to this day. Even after 1,500 years, the holy relics remain incorrupt and work many life-giving wonders. Saint Spyridon is venerated as the Patron of Corfu.

St Finian of Clonard (549)

"St Finian, known as the 'Tutor of the Saints of Ireland,' stands with St Enda of Aran at the head of the patriarchs of Irish monasticism. He showed great zeal and piety for God from his youth. He had already founded three churches before he set off for Wales to study at the feet of St Cadoc at Llancarfan (September 25, †577). In Llancarfan he became close friends with St Gildas (January 29, †570), another of St Cadoc's disciples. Upon his return to Ireland, he founded the great Monastery of Clonard during the same year the great St Enda (March 21, †530) reposed in Aran. A multitude of illustrious and holy men studied under St Finian, including the famous 'Twelve Apostles of Ireland.' St Finian founded many other monasteries during his lifetime, including the famous island monastery of Skellig Michael off the southwest coast of Ireland." (Saint Herman Calendar 2003)

Hieromartyr Alexander, Patriarch of Jerusalem

Holy Martyr Synesius

Venerable Therapontes of Monza

Day 12-Dec-2023 Tuesday

Fast Day/ oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.
Readings of the day: 2 Timothy 3:16-4:4; Luke 19:45-48
16 Every Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for instruction in righteousness,
17 so that the man of God may be fully qualified, completely equipped for every good work.
4 A charge to preach the word Before God and the Lord Jesus Christ who will judge the living and the dead at his appearing and his Kingdom, I charge you to 2preach the word.
Welcome or unwelcome, insist on it; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and instruction.
3 Indeed, the time will come when people will not listen to the sound doctrine, but, having itching ears, they will gather around them teachers who agree with their own lusts.
4 They will turn away their ears from the truth and turn to fables.

Gospel Reading:
45 Then Jesus entered into the temple, and he began to drive out those who bought and sold in it,
46 saying to them, 'It is written, 'My house is a house of prayer, but you have made it a 'den of robbers!'
47 He was teaching every day in the temple, but the chief priests, the scribes and the leading men among the people were looking for a way to destroy him.
48 However, they could not find a way to do so because all the people were captured by every word that he said.

Day 13-Dec-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

St Herman, Wonderworker of Alaska (1836). First Martyrs of America Juvenaly (1796) and Peter the Aleut (1815)

St Herman, for many the Patron of North America, was born near Moscow around 1756 to a pious merchant family, and entered monastic life at the age of sixteen, at the Trinity - St Sergius Lavra near St Petersburg. While there he was attacked by a cancer of the face, but the Mother of God appeared to him and healed him completely. He was tonsured a monk in 1783 with the name of Herman (a form of Germanos), and was received into Valaam Monastery on Lake Ladoga. After some time, he was allowed to withdraw to the life of a hermit in the forest, and only came to the monastery for feast days.

In 1793, in response to a request by the Russian-American Commercial Company for missionaries to Alaska, Valaam Monastery was told to select a company of its best monks to travel to America. Eight were chosen, of whom the hermit Herman was one. The company crossed all of Siberia and , almost a year later, first saw Kodiak Island in September 1794. The missionaries set about their work, and found the native Aleut people so receptive to the Gospel of Christ that in the first year about 7,000 were baptized and 1,500 marriages performed.

Despite severe hardships, the missionaries covered huge distances, on foot and in small boats, to reach the scattered fishing settlements of the Aleuts. In general they found a warm reception, but many of the pagan shamans opposed their message and sometimes stirred up the people against them. It was thus that the Priest-monk Juvenaly was killed in 1796, becoming the First Martyr of North America.

Despite such opposition, the missionaries' major difficulty was with the Russian traders and settlers, who were in the habit of exploiting the Aleuts as they wished, and who had oppressed and disgusted the native people with their immoral behavior. When the missionaries came to the defense of the natives, they were repaid with the opposition of the Russian-American company, whose leadership put countless obstacles in the path of their work. In time, several of the company died at sea, and several more abandoned the mission in discouragement, leaving the monk Herman alone.

He settled on Spruce Island near Kodiak, and once again took up the hermit's life, dwelling in a small cabin in the forest. He spent his days in prayer and mission work, and denied himself every fleshly comfort: he fasted often and lived on a diet of blackberries, mushrooms and vegetables (in Alaska!!).

Despite these privations, he founded an orphanage and a school for the natives of the island, cared for the sick in epidemics, and built a chapel where he conducted divine services attended by many. (He was not a priest, but God made up the lack in miraculous ways: at Theophany, Angels descended to bless the waters of the bay, and the Saint would use the holy water to heal the sick). Asked if he was ever lonely or dejected in his solitude, and replied: "I am not alone; God is here as everywhere, and the Angels too. There is no better company."

Saint Herman reposed in peace on Spruce island, at the age of eighty-one, in 1836. At the moment of his departure, his face was radiant with light, and the inhabitants nearby saw a pillar of light rising above his hermitage. His last wish was to be buried on Spruce Island. When some of his well-intended disciples attempted to take his relics back to Kodiak to be buried from the church there, a storm rose up and continued unabated until they had abandoned the plan and buried him as he desired. He was officially glorified in 1970, the first canonized American Saint.

Saint Peter was a young Aleut convert to the Orthodox faith. In 1812 the Russian- American Company set up a post in California, where Russians and Aleuts farmed and traded to supply the needs of the Alaskans; Peter was one of these. The Spanish, who at the time ruled California, suspected the Russians of territorial ambitions, and in 1815 captured about twenty Orthodox Aleuts and took them to San Francisco. Fourteen of these were put to torture in an effort to convert them to the Roman Catholic faith. All refused to compromise their faith, and Peter and a companion were singled out for especially vicious treatment: Peter's fingers, then hands and feet, were severed, and he died from loss of blood, still firm in his confession. The Latins were preparing the same fate for the others when word came that they were to be transferred; eventually they returned to Alaska. When he heard a first-hand account of Peter's martyrdom, Saint Herman crossed himself and said "Holy New Martyr Peter, pray to God for us!" Saint Peter the Aleut is the first recognized Saint of American birth.

St Herman appears several times on the Church's calendar. The Synaxis of St Herman and the American Protomartyrs is celebrated today. St Herman is commemorated on November 15, the day of his repose; but (partly because pilgrimage to Alaska is so difficult in the winter) the day of his glorification, July 27 / August 9 is kept there as his primary feast day.

Following is a fragment of a conversation between St Herman and some officers of a Russian ship, recorded by his disciple Yanovsky; it includes perhaps the most familiar quotation from St Herman.

"But do you love God?" asked the Elder. And all answered: "Of course we love God. How can we not love God?" "And I, a sinner, have tried to love God for more than forty years, and I cannot say that I perfectly love Him," answered Father Herman, and began to explain how one must love God. "If

we love someone," he said, "then we always think of that one, we strive to please that one; day and night our heart is preoccupied with that object. Is it in this way, gentlemen, that you love God? Do you often turn to Him, do you always remember Him, do you always pray to Him and fulfill His Holy commandments?" We had to admit that we did not. "For our good, for our happiness," concluded the Elder, "at least let us give a vow to ourselves, that from this day, from this hour, from this minute, we shall strive above all else to love God and to do His Holy Will!"

Saint Herman is also commemorated on December 12.

† Martyrs Eustratius, Auxentius, Eugene, Mardarius, and Orestes at Sebaste

"These five courageous men shone like five resplendent stars in the dark days of the anti-Christian Emperors Diocletian and Maximian. St Eustratius was a Roman general in the city of Satalios, Eugene was one of his comrades in arms and Orestes likewise a respected soldier. Auxentius was a priest and Mardarius a simple citizen who came, like Eustratius, from the town of Aravraca. The imperial governors, Lysias and Agricola, tortured Auxentius first as he was a priest. Beholding the innocent suffering of the Christians, Eustratius presented himself before Lycias and declared that he also was a Christian. While Eustratius was being tortured, Eugene stood up before the judge and cried out: 'I am a Christian too, Lycias!' When they were driving Eustratius and the other martyrs through the town, Mardarius saw them from the roof of his house, and he took leave of his wife and two frail daughters and hastened after them, shouting into the faces of their tormentors: 'I am a Christian too, like the Lord Eustratius!' Orestes was a young and handsome soldier, who stood head and shoulders above all the other soldiers. One day, when he was at target practice in Lycias's presence, the Cross he was wearing fell from his breast, and Lycias realised that he was a Christian. Orestes openly confessed his faith, and was martyred with the others. Auxentius was beheaded, Eugene and Mardarius died under torture, Orestes was exposed on a red-hot iron grid and Eustratius died in a flaming furnace. St Blaise (see Feb. 11th) gave Communion to St Eustratius in prison before his death. Their relics were later taken to Constantinople, and are preserved in the church dedicated to them — The Holy Five Companions. They were seen alive in that church, and St Orestes appeared to St Dimitri of Rostov (see Oct. 28th). A beautiful prayer by St Eustratius is extant, which is read at the Midnight Service on Saturdays: 'I glorify Thy majesty, 0 Lord for Thou hast regarded my lowliness and hast not shut me up in the hands of my enemies, but hast saved my soul from want...'. " (Prologue)

Holy Virgin Maryr Lucy of Syracuse (304)

During Diocletian's persecutians, the Christian maiden Lucy went with her mother on pilgrimage to the tomb of St Agatha (February 5), to pray for her mother's healing from an ailment. Saint Agatha appeared to Lucy in a dream and said 'Lucy, my sister, why do you ask from me what your own faith can obtain? Your mother is healed. You will soon be the glory of Syracuse as I am of Catania.' Lucy's mother was healed from that day, and Lucy determined to consecrate herself entirely to God. She broke off an engagement to a nobly-born young man and gave her large dowry of land and jewels to the poor. Her would-be husband angrily denounced her as a Christian to the Governor of Syracuse.

At the tribunal, Lucy firmly confessed her faith in Christ and refused to make sacrifice to the gods. The Governor ordered that she be placed in a brothel, but his minions were unable to move her from the place where she stood, even when they tied her with ropes and attempted to drag her with oxen. The Governor asked what witchcraft she used, to which she answered 'I do not use witchcraft — it is the power of God that is with me. Bring ten thousand of your men if you wish; they will not be able to move me unless God wills it.' The men then lit a fire around her, but it did not harm her. Finally they beheaded her where she stood. With her last words, she predicted the deaths of Maximian and Diocletian, and the coming of peace to the Church.

Hieromartyr Gabriel, Archbishop of Serbia

Saints Juvenal and Peter the Aleut, the First Martyrs of America

Day 13-Dec-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: 2 Timothy 4:9-22; Luke 20:1-8
9 Do your utmost to visit me soon, 10 because Demas, having loved this present
world, has left me and went to Thessalonica.
Crescens went to Galatia and Titus to Dalmatia.
11 Only Luke is still with me.
Bring Mark along with you because he is helpful to me for service.
12 I have sent Tychicus to Ephesus.
13 When you come, bring the cloak that I left at Troas with Carpus, as wells as the
books, especially the parchments.
14 Alexander, the metalworker did much evil to me.
The Lord will repay him according to his works.
15 Beware of him, for he greatly opposed our teachings.
16 At my first defense, no one came to help me, but all left me.
May it not be held against them!
17 Still, the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the
message might be fully proclaimed and heard by all the Gentiles.
I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion
18 and the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for his
heavenly Kingdom.
To him be the glory now and unto ages of ages! Amen.
Final greeting 19 Greet Prisca, Aquila, and the house of Onesiphorus.
20 Erastus remained at Corinth, but I left Trophimus at Miletus sick.
21 Do your best to come before winter.
Eubulus greets you, as well as Pudens, Linus, Claudia and all the brethren.
22 May the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit! Grace be with you.
Amen.

Gospel Reading:
1 It happened on one of those days, as he was teaching the people in the temple
and preaching the Good News, that the priests and scribes came to him with the
presbyters.
2 They asked him, 'Tell us: by what authority do you do these things? Who is
giving you this authority?'
3 He answered them, 'I too will ask you one question.

Tell me: 4 the baptism of John, was it from heaven, or from men?'
5 They discussed it among themselves, saying, 'If we say, 'From heaven,' he will reply, 'Why then did not you believe him?'
6 But if we say, 'From men,' all the people will stone us because they are convinced that John was a prophet.
7 So they answered that they did not know where it was from.
8 Then Jesus said to them, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

Day 14-Dec-2023 Thursday

Fast Day/ oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Holy Martyrs Thyrsus, Leucis and Callinicus (250)

These martyrs contested in Asia Minor during the reign of Decius. Thyrsus and Leucis were executed after horrible torture for confessing themselves as Christians and rebuking the Governor for his slaughter of their brethren. Callinicus was a pagan priest, converted by witnessing the martyrdom and miracles of St Thyrsus; he was beheaded.

Holy Martyrs Philemon, Apollonius, Arian and those with them (3rd c.)

"During the reign of Diocletian (284-305), the Governor of Antinoe in the Thebaid of Upper Egypt was Arian, a fierce persecutor who had sent many Christians to a violent death, among them Saints Timothy and Maura (see May 3) and Saint Sabine (Mar. 16). When he had imprisoned thirty-seven Christians for their confession of faith, one of them, named Apollonius, a reader of the Church, lost his courage at the sight of the instruments of torture, and thought how he might escape torments without denying Christ. He gave money to Philemon, a flute-player and a pagan, that he might put on Apollonius' clothes and offer sacrifices before Arian, so that all would think Apollonius to have done the Governor's will, and he might be released. Philemon agreed to this, but when the time came to offer sacrifice, enlightened by divine grace, he declared himself a Christian instead. He and Apollonius, who also confessed Christ when the fraud was exposed, were both beheaded. Before beheading them, Arian had commanded that they be shot with arrows, but while they remained unharmed, Arian himself was wounded by one of the arrows; Saint Philemon foretold that after his martyrdom, Arian would be healed at his tomb. When this came to pass, Arian, the persecutor who had slain so many servants of Christ, himself believed in Christ and was baptized with four of his body-guards. Diocletian heard of this and had Arian and his body-guards brought to him. For their confession of Christ, they were cast into the sea, and received the crown of life everlasting." (Great Horologion)

Venerable Daniel of Voronets

Day 14-Dec-2023 Thursday

Fast Day/ oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.
Readings of the day: Titus 1:5-2:1; Luke 20:9-18
1 Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ [appointed] to bring God's
elect to faith and to the knowledge of the truth which leads to godliness, 2 and also
to the hope of eternal life, which God who cannot lie promised before the age
began.
3 In his own time, he revealed his word in the message I was entrusted with
according to the commandment of God our Savior.
4 To Titus, my true child according to the faith which we share: Grace, mercy, and
peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior.
Titus' commission in Crete – Requirement for Church offices 5 I left you in Crete
for this reason: that you would set in order the things that were amiss and appoint
presbyters in every city, as I directed you: Proclaim what is consistent with sound
doctrine

Gospel Reading:

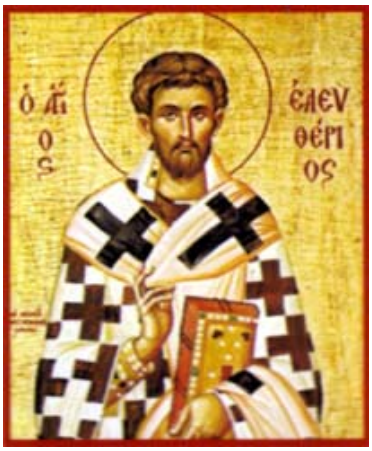
9 He began to tell the people this parable.
'A certain man planted a vineyard, and rented it out to some farmers, and went into
another country for a long time.
10 At the proper season, he sent a servant to the farmers to collect his share of
the fruit of the vineyard.
But the farmers beat the servant and sent him away with nothing.
11 The owner then sent yet another servant, and they also beat him, treated him
with contempt, and sent him away empty.
12 The owner sent yet a third [servant], and they also wounded him, and threw him
out.
13 Then, the lord of the vineyard thought, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved
son! It may be that seeing him, they will respect him.
14 But when the farmers saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying: 'This
is the heir! Come, let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.
15 So, they threw the son out of the vineyard, and killed him.
Now, what will the lord of the vineyard do to them? 16 He will come and destroy
these farmers, and he will give the vineyard to others.
When the people heard this, they exclaimed, 'May it never be!' 17 But Jesus
looked at them, and said, 'Then what is this that is written: 'The stone which the

builders rejected, Has become the chief cornerstone?' 18 Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and it will crush to dust whoever it falls on.

Day 15-Dec-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Hieromartyr Eleutherius, Bishop of Illyria, and those with him (126)



From a good tree comes good fruit. This wonderful saint had noble and greatly eminent parents. Eleutherius was born in Rome, where his father was an imperial proconsul. His mother Anthia heard the Gospel from the great Apostle Paul and was baptized by him. Having been left a widow early, she entrusted her only son for study and service to Anicetus the Bishop of Rome. Seeing how Eleutherius was gifted by God and illumined by the grace of God, the bishop ordained him a deacon at the age of fifteen, a priest at the age of eighteen, and a bishop at the age of twenty. Eleutherius's God-given wisdom made up for what he lacked in years, and this chosen one of God was appointed Bishop of Illyria with his seat in Valona (Avlona), Albania. The good shepherd guarded his flock well and increased their number day by day. Emperor Hadrian, a persecutor of Christians, sent the commander Felix with soldiers to seize Eleutherius and bring him to Rome. When the raging Felix arrived in Valona and entered the church, he saw and heard the holy hierarch of God; suddenly his heart changed, and he became a Christian. Eleutherius baptized Felix and departed for Rome with him, returning joyfully as if he were going to a feast and not to trial and torture. The emperor subjected the noble Eleutherius to harsh torture: flogging, roasting on an iron bed, boiling in pitch, and burning in a fiery furnace. But Eleutherius was delivered from all these deadly tortures by God's power. Seeing all this, Caribus the Roman eparch declared that he also was a Christian. Caribus was tortured and then beheaded, and so was Blessed Felix. Finally, the imperial executioners cut off the honourable head of St. Eleutherius. When this mother, the holy Anthia, came and stood over the dead body of her son, she also was beheaded. Their bodies were translated to Valona, where event today St. Eleutherius glorifies the name of Christ by his many miracles. He suffered during the reign of Hadrian in the year 120.

Source: St. Nikolai Velimirovic, The Prologue of Ohrid – Volume Two.

Apolytikion

Adorned with flowing priestly vesture and with dripping streams of blood you at once went to your Lord Christ, O blessed wise Eleutherius, annihilator of Satan. Wherefore, do not cease to intercede for those who honor your blessed struggles in faith.

Kontakion

O venerable One, we all praise and entreat you, Eleutherius, Priest-Martyr, comeliness of Priests and exaltation of champions. Deliver from diverse dangers those fervently honoring your memory, interceding unceasingly for us all.

Holy Martyr Eleutherius the Cubicularius (4th c.)

He was from a noble family in Constantinople, and rose to the rank of Cubicularius (Chamberlain). He was not only a counselor to, but a close friend of, the Emperor (probably Julian the Apostate). But Eleutherius was increasingly moved by a desire to become a Christian; so, obtaining a leave from the Imperial court, he moved to the countryside in Bithynia, where he was baptized. There he built a house that concealed an underground chapel.

When Eleutherius returned to court, some jealous courtiers denounced him to the Emperor, who visited Eleutherius' country house and was furious to discover the underground church. When the Saint would not renounce his faith in Christ, the Emperor, ignoring all previous bonds of friendship, had him beheaded.

Holy Martyr Bacchus the New (787)

During the reign of Constantine VI and Irene, restorers of the holy icons, the Holy Land was under the control of the Muslim Arabs. Many Christians there apostatized, putting honors and security in this world above their eternal joy. One of these was the father of this Saint, who brought up seven children as Muslims. His wife however, never renounced her Faith and prayed constantly for the conversion of her husband and children. Upon the death of the father, her third son Dachak declared that he wished to become a Christian. He was baptized in the Monastery of St Sabas near Jerusalem, receiving the name Bacchus, and determined to be a monk. But the abbot, fearing reprisals against the Monastery, sent him back to his home in Jerusalem. His brothers, seeing his joy and boldness in confessing the Faith, decided to receive holy Baptism, except for one, who denounced Bacchus to the authorities. He was arrested and brought before the judge and, when he proved steadfast in his confession of Christ, was beheaded.

Our Venerable Father Tryphon of Kola, apostle of Laponia (1583), and his disciple the Holy Martyr Jonah (1590)

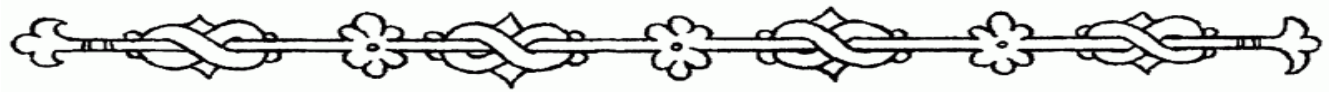
Saint Tryphon was the son of a priest from Novgorod. The Synaxarion records that, at the moment of his birth, the verse Blessed is the life of those who

dwell in the desert was being sung in the Matins service. In 1525 he was moved by a divine revelation to flee to the far north of Russia and live as a hermit. He settled near the River Kola, where he devoted his nights to prayer, his days to proclaiming the Gospel of Christ to the native peoples there. The pagans were hostile at first, but his patience and humility won them over, and he baptized many. He built them a church with his own hands on the shores of Lake Ladoga, and later founded a monastery there. Saint Tryphon reposed in 1583. He predicted his own death and the coming destruction of the Monastery by the Swedes, which came to pass in 1590. All the monks were massacred. The first victim, Starets Jonah, worked many miracles at the Monastery after its restoration.

Saint Stephen the Confessor of Sourozh

Venerable Paul of Latros

Martyr Susannah the Deaconess



Day 15-Dec-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Titus 1:15-2:10; Luke 20:19-26
15 To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving,
nothing is pure; but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. 16 They
profess to know God, but by their works they deny him, being detestable,
disobedient, and unfit for any good work.
2 1 Proclaim what is consistent with sound doctrine: 2 that older men should be
temperate, sensible, sober-minded, sound in faith, love and patience. 3 Likewise,
older women should be reverent in behavior, not malicious gossips, nor addicted to
much wine but teachers of what is good.
4 They should instruct the young women to love their husbands, to love their
children, 5 to be sober-minded, chaste, to work in the home, [and to be] kind.
Young women should be in subjection to their own husbands, so that God’s word
may not be disgraced. 6 Likewise, exhort the younger men to be sober-minded. 7
Be an example of good works in all things. In your teaching, show integrity,
seriousness, incorruptibility
8 and soundness of speech that is irreproachable. This way, those who oppose
you will be ashamed, having nothing bad to say about us. 9 Exhort servants to be
in subjection to their own masters and well-pleasing in all things. They should not
be argumentative; 10 they should not be stealing, but [instead be] trustworthy, so
that they may make the doctrine of God our Savior attractive in every way.

Gospel Reading:

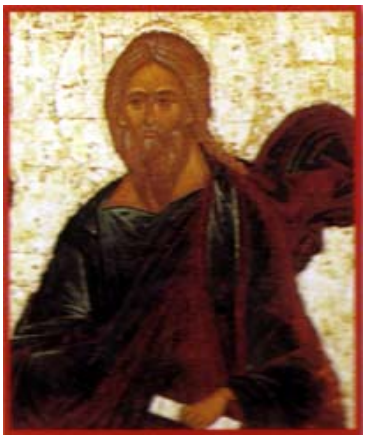
19 The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to lay hands on him
that very hour, but they feared the people because they knew that he had spoken
this parable against them.
20 They watched him and sent out spies who pretended to be righteous in order to
trap him in something he might say, so that they might hand him over to the power
and authority of the governor.
21They asked him, 'Teacher, we know that you say and teach what is right, and
that you are not partial to anyone but truly teach the way of God.
22 Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?' 23 But Jesus perceived their
trickery and said to them, 'Why are you testing me?e 24 Show me a denarius!
Whose image and inscription are on it?' They answered, 'Caesar's.
25 So Jesus said to them, 'Then, give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and
[give] to God what belongs to God!' 26 And they were not able to ensnare him in

his words before the people.
They marveled at his answer and remained silent.

Day 16-Dec-2023 Saturday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Holy Prophet Haggai (~520 BC)



He was born in Babylon, of the priestly tribe of Levi, during the captivity of the Jews. After their return to Jerusalem, the Jews began to rebuild the Temple and to worship there according to the Law, but were discouraged by opposition from the local population (many of them Jews who had not gone into captivity). So God raised up the holy Prophets Haggai and Zechariah (February 8) to stir the people to complete their sacred work. Haggai's prophecies reveal that the drought that the Hebrews were suffering was brought about by their failure to complete the rebuilding of Jerusalem, and would only end when they rededicated themselves to their work. He is ranked tenth among the minor Prophets.

Holy Empress and Wonderworker Theophano (893)

She was born to noble parents in Constantinople. Beautiful and pious, she was chosen by the Emperor Basil (867-886) to be the bride of his son Leo VI the Wise. When Leo ascended the throne, the Empress showed no attraction to the honors and pleasures of the royal life, but devoted her days to prayer and almsgiving. She fulfilled all the duties of her Imperial station while living a life of austerity whenever out of the world's sight. Beneath her rich garments she wore coarse haircloth, and kept fasts and vigils as if she were living the monastic life. She was humble and respectful to all, and would address even her servants as 'Master' or 'Mistress.' At night, after her servants had left her alone, she would leave her fine bed and sleep on a mat on the floor, rising often during the night to pray.

After her daughter Eudocia died in 892, she wished to leave the world and enter a monastery, but her spiritual father St Euthymius (August 5) would not give his blessing. Nonetheless, her time in the world was not long: only three years later she died, before she had reached the age of thirty. Immediately after her funeral in the Church of the Holy Apostles, her holy relics became the source of many miracles and healings, and are venerated to this day in the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople.

Saint Modestus, Archbishop of Jerusalem

Saint Nicholas Chrysoverges, Patriarch of Constantinople

Saint Theophano the Empress

Martyr Marinus
Venerable Sophia of Moscow

Day 16-Dec-2023 Saturday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.
Readings of the day: Ephesians 1:16-23; Luke 12:32-40
16 do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers.
17 [I pray] that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation to bring you to full knowledge of him.
18 Having the eyes of your heart enlightened, may you experience the hope of his calling and know the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.
19 May you also experience the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to his power and might 20 which he accomplished in Christ, when he raised him from the dead and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places.
21Yes, Christ now sits above all rule, authority, power, dominion, and every name that can be named, not only in this age, but also in the age to come.
22 God put all things in subjection under his feet and granted him to be head over all things for the sake of the Church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Gospel Reading:

32 Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.
33 Sell your possessions and give to those in need.
Make for yourselves purses which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief can reach and where moth cannot destroy.
34 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.
35 Be dressed in readiness and keep your lamps burning.
36 Be like people waiting for their master to return from the wedding feast, ready to open the door as soon as he comes and knocks.
37 Blessed are those servants whom the lord will find watching when he comes! Amen, I tell you: he will dress himself [to serve], make them recline, and he will come to serve them! 38 They will be blessed if the master comes in the second or third watch, and finds them doing so.
39 But know this, that if the master of the house had known when the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and not allowed his house to be broken into.
40 Therefore, be ready also, for the Son of Man is coming in an hour when you do not expect him.

Day 17-Dec-2023 Sunday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Holy Prophet Daniel and the Three Holy Youths Ananias, Azarias and Misael

Their wonderful story is told in the Book of Daniel, in which the coming of Christ is prophesied and prefigured in several places. Large portions of the book are missing from the protestant Bible: make every effort to obtain and read the full version.

The Song of the Three Youths in the Furnace have become the Seventh and Eight of the Old Testament Odes of the Matins Canon; the Odes are sung in full only in monasteries during Lent. The Three Youths' sojourn in the fiery furnace is prominent in Orthodox hymns and devotions, for their passage through the flames unharmed is a type of the holy Virgin's incorrupt birth-giving: receiving the divine Fire within her womb, she was not consumed but remained ever-virgin.

According to the Synaxarion, Daniel reposed in peace at the age of eighty, two years after the return of the Hebrew people from their captivity in Babylon. The Three Youths also reposed in peace. But St Cyril of Alexandria writes that all of them met a martyr's end, by beheading.

According to tradition these four were among the righteous dead who rose at Christ's Crucifixion and were seen by many (Matthew ch. 27).

The Three Holy Youths were named, in Hebrew, Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael; the names given above are Greek renderings of the Hebrew names. Their captors also gave them Babylonian names, by which they are also called: Shadrach, Abed-nego, and Meshak, respectively. Daniel was given the Babylonian name Belteshazzar.

Our Holy Father Dionysius the New of Zakinthos (1624)

He was born to pious and wealthy parents on the island of Zakinthos. Early in life he renounced his wealth and worldly honors to enter monastic life. His virtue became so well known that he was appointed Archbishop of Aegina, where he served for many years. In time, in order to retire to a life of solitude and struggle, he resigned and returned to his homeland where he entered a monastery in the mountains. Here he received the grace of performing miracles, and worked many healing and saving wonders among the people of Zakinthos.

A story from the Synaxarion reveals his character as one truly united to Christ: "He excelled above all in love of neighbour and in meekness. One day the murderer of the Saint's own brother, fleeing the law and the members of his victim's family, arrived at the monastery and begged Dionysius for asylum, little knowing to whom he was speaking. On gathering the reason for his flight and that his own brother was the victim, the man of God resisted with all his strength his natural grief and the temptation to avenge the crime. Imitating Christ, who pardoned his enemies and prayed for his persecutors, he received the fugitive with compassion, comforted him, exhorted him to repent and hid him in an out-of-the-way cell. When his pursuing kinsmen reached the monastery with the dreadful news, the Saint did not reveal that he knew it already, but did his best with words of peace to allay the wrath of his relatives and their desire for vengeance. As soon as they moved off, he let out the murderer (who was amazed and terror-struck before such superhuman goodness) and having provided him with victuals and money for his journey, he sent him away to work freely at the salvation of his soul."

The holy bishop reposed in 1622 after a long and painful illness. He has continued to work signs and miracles and to appear from time to time to the people of Zakinthos, who venerate him as their protector and patron.

Venerable New Martyrs Paisius and Habakkuk of Serbia

Day 17-Dec-2023 Sunday

Fast Day/ Fish, oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Gospel Reading :Sunday of the Holy Ancestors of Christ (Two Sundays before Nativity)
Colossians 3:4-11; Luke 14:16-24
4 When Christ who is our life is revealed, then you will also be revealed with him in glory.
5 Therefore, put to death what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, depraved passions, lust and greed (which is idolatry). 6 Because of these things, the wrath of God is coming on the children of disobedience. 7 You also used to live in those things when you lived among these people;
8 but now, put them all away: anger, rage, evil, slander, and shameful language.
9 Do not lie to one another. You have put off the old self with his doings 10and you have put on the new self who is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of his Creator. 11 Here, there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free; but Christ is all, and in all!

Gospel Reading :Sunday of the Holy Ancestors of Christ (Two Sundays before Nativity) Luke 14:16-24

The Lord said this parable: 'A man once gave a great banquet, and invited many; and at the time of the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come; for all is now ready.’ But they all alike began to make excuses.
The first said to him, ‘I have bought a field, and I go out and see it; I pray you, have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I must go to examine them; I pray you, have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’
So the servant came and reported this to his master. Then the householder in anger said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and maimed and blind and lame.’ And the servant said,
‘Sir, what you commanded has been done, and there is still room.’ And the master said to the servant, ‘Go out to the highways and hedges, and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet. For many are called, but few are chosen."

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING

We cannot, and very often do not really want to, see ourselves as God sees us, because that truth is usually rather uncomfortable. Hence Christ spoke much in parables, which leave us free to apply to ourselves as much or as little as our conscience can bear of God's perspective on our state.

When Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise, it was in fact man who then expelled God from his soul, which had swelled up in the fiendish thrill of pride and rebellion, and set up the false god of his own selfish ego in place of the Tree of Life at the centre of his world, thus turning the paradise of delight into a place of thorns, thistles, sweat, toil and tears.

When God entered this world meekly as the Son of Man to rescue us, He was cast out and crucified by those who could not endure the humility and love of the real God.

In His ineffable patience and mercy, God continues to invite us back to Paradise, to union with Him, to share in the bliss of His eternal Life.

Yet how often do we still reject this invitation in favour of our fallen world, all because we cling to our desire to possess, to rule, to show off, to be in charge, to impose our will on others and prove that we are 'somebody'? Yet this addiction to our 'own' world, with its selfish ambition and the desire to dominate poisons all our relations to the material world, to family, to neighbour and to God, with insecurity, anxiety, rivalry, envy, discord, mistrust, fear and hatred.

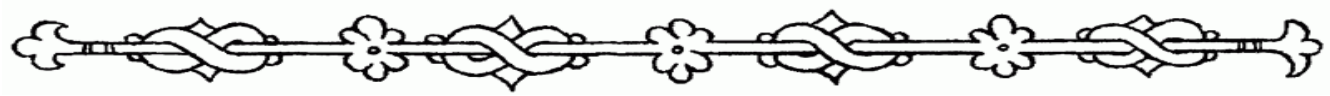
Even if we attend Church and pray regularly, our blind ego can easily accept the satanic thought that we are therefore 'better than others', and so we can become like the Pharisees to whom Christ addressed this parable.

Hence Christ tells us that those who enter His banquet are the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind - which means those who truly know and confess their weakness and sinfulness before God, and those who are compelled to enter the feast through their humble awareness of their need for God's love and healing in their afflicted state.

Christ our true God comes to dwell only in a humbled and broken soul, which contracts and makes room for Him to enter. If we crucify our own selfishness and

ego, we too can enter the banquet of Christ's humble friends who come to Him in repentance.
Instead of strife and stress, we can taste the joy of peace which comes from allowing the true God our Creator, the source and goal of our life, the Alpha and Omega of all that exists, to have the Kingdom, the power and the glory which are His and His only, but which He will then share with us, his beloved children.

ST CYRIL OF JERUSALEM ON THE SIGN OF THE CROSS
ll kings when they die, have their power extinguished with their life: but Christ after being crucified, is worshipped by the whole world. We proclaim Christ crucified, and the devils tremble; yet many others have in course of time been crucified, but when has the invocation of any one of these scared away the devils?
Let us not then be ashamed of the Cross of Christ; but though another hide it, do you openly seal it on your brow: that the devils beholding that princely Sign, may flee far away trembling. But make this Sign, when you eat and drink, sit or lie down, rise up, speak, walk: in a word, on every occasion; for
He who was crucified here, is above in the heavens. Be the Cross our seal made with boldness by our fingers on our brow, and in every thing; over the bread we eat, and the cup we drink; in our comings in, and goings out; before our sleep, when we lie down and when we awake; when we are in the way, and when we are still.
Great is that preservative; it is without price, for the poor's sake; without toil, for the sick; since also its grace is from God. It is the Sign of the faithful, and the dread of devils...for when they see the Cross, they are reminded of the Crucified...Despise not the Seal, because of the freeness of the gift; but for this rather honour your Benefactor. [Catechetical Lectures 4:13-14 & 13:36]



Day 18-Dec-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Martyr Sebastian and those with him (287)

He grew up in Milan and became an army officer, where he distinguished himself so well that the Emperor Diocletian made him captain of the Praetorian Guard not suspecting that Sebastian was a Christian. In Rome, while fulfilling the duties of a courtier, he used his position to comfort and encourage his imprisoned fellow-Christians. By his labors and example he brought many to faith in Christ, including Chromatius, the Prefect in charge of persecuting the Roman Christians.

Sebastian had upheld two brothers, Mark and Marcellinus, who were awaiting execution for their faith. When the day of execution came, their father Tranquillinus, who had been a pagan but through Sebastian's example had converted, presented himself to Chromatius and announced that he too was a Christian. His testimony was so powerful that the hard heart of the Prefect was melted, and he himself resolved to become a Christian.

Caius, Bishop of Rome, gathered the new brethren (both men and women — not all of Sebastian's converts have been mentioned here) to embrace them and baptize them, but also to warn them of their coming Martyrdom. He instructed some to flee the city and others, headed by Sebastian, to remain in Rome, devoting their days to fasting, prayer and thanksgiving as they awaited their death. As the "company of Martyrs" did this, many came to them and were healed of ailments, and many joined them in confessing Christ.

When the time of martyrdom came, each member of the company was subjected to imaginatively cruel tortures before his execution. Sebastian himself was made to witness the deaths of all his companions, then to endure his own trial. He serenely confessed his unshaken faith before Diocletian himself before being taken to the place of execution. There he was tied to a post and made the target of a band of archers until his body bristled with arrows like the quills of a porcupine. He was left for dead, but when Irene, widow of St Castulus, came to bury him, she found him alive and tended his wounds. Amazingly, he recovered, and presented himself once again to the Emperor. Astonished and outraged, the tyrant ordered that Sebastian be

beaten to death with clubs and thrown into the city's sewer. That evening, a pious Christian woman was told in a vision to retrieve his body and bury it in the catacombs. After St Constantine brought peace to the Church, Pope Damasus built a church over the site in the Saint's honor. For hundreds of years, many miracles were worked there through St Sebastian's intercessions.

Holy Hieromartyr Modestus I, Archbishop of Jerusalem (634)

His parents were pious Christians from Sebaste in Asia Minor, who died in prison while Modestus was still an infant. The child was raised by pagans, but when he learned that his parents had died for Christ, he secretly became a Christian also. When his adoptive parents died, he traveled to Athens, where he was taken in by a Christian goldsmith and his wife, and became a Christian at the age of thirteen. Modestus' almsgiving and love for the poor soon earned him renown, but aroused the envy of the goldsmith's sons, who sold Modestus into slavery during a trip to Egypt. But Modestus was able to bring his new master to faith in Christ and regain his freedom.

Some time later he made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The doors of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre opened at his prayers, and the people, taking this as a sign from God, chose Modestus as Archbishop of Jerusalem. (Accounts of his life do not mention his having been anything but a layman before this.) He served his flock tenderly and zealously, encouraging all to abound in spiritual gifts, and working many miracles. His prayers were effective not only in healing the faithful, but even in curing the ailments of their cattle and other animals. For this reason, it is still customary on this day to sprinkle animals pens and stables, and even houses in which pets dwell, with holy water, asking the Saint's protection.

Saint Modestus served his flock faithfully into old age. According to some accounts he reposed in peace. According to others, in his old age he was delivered up to the pagans by his enemies, and beheaded by them after many torments.

Daniel the Hesychast

Saint Daniel the Hesychast, the great wonderworker and instructor of monastics, was born in Moldavia at the beginning of the fifteenth century. He was baptized with the name Dumitru. When he was sixteen, he became a monk of the monastery of St Nicholas at Radauti and received the name David. His spiritual Father was Saint Leontius of Radauti (July 1). After many years of ascetical struggles, he became a chosen vessel of the Spirit and was ordained to the holy priesthood.

He lived for some years at the Monastery of Saint Lawrence in the Vicoul de Sus district. There he fulfilled his obediences during the day, and at night he kept vigil, prayed, and wove baskets. He received the Great Schema and the new name Daniel. He obtained the abbot's blessing to live in the wilderness in solitude, where he devoted himself to spiritual struggles. Around 1450, he

lived near the Neamts Monastery by Secu Creek for fourteen years. In time, people discovered where he lived and came to visit him. Longing for solitude, he moved to northern Moldavia and chiseled out a cell for himself in the face of a cliff near Putna Creek. Next to it, he carved out a small chapel for prayer.

After his spiritual child Saint Stephen the Great (July 2) built the Putna Monastery, which was consecrated in 1470, Saint Daniel moved near the Voronets Monastery. Here too, he carved a small cell out of the rock under Soim (Falcon) Cliff and lived a God-pleasing life for the next twenty years. He guided many disciples in the principles of the spiritual life, and he also had the gift of healing the sick of their physical infirmities.

In 1488, when he was over eighty years old, Saint Daniel went to live at the Voronets Monastery, where he was chosen to be the abbot.

Saint Daniel was a great ascetic and wonderworker, wise and clairvoyant. People from near and far visited him seeking his spiritual advice, or to confess their sins. He died in 1496 and was buried at the Voronet Monastery, where people continue to venerate his tomb.

Saint Daniel was glorified by the Romanian Orthodox Church on 20 July 1992.

Saint Florus, Bishop of Amisus
Our Righteous Father Michael Syngellon the Confessor
Martyr Eubiotus
Saint Gatianus, Bishop of Tours

Day 18-Dec-2023 Monday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Hebrews 3:5-11; Luke 20:27-44
5 Moses indeed was a faithful servant in all of God's house, as a testimony for
what would later on be spoken about.
6 But Christ is faithful as a Son over his [own] house and we are his house, if we
firmly hold on to the confidence and pride of our hope until the end.
7 Therefore, even as the Holy Spirit says: Today if you will hear his voice,a 8 do
not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, as in the day of the trial in the
wilderness, 9 where your fathers tested me by proving me, and saw my works for
forty years.
10 Therefore, I was displeased with that generation and said, 'They always go
astray in their heart, they did not know my ways;' 11 As I swore in my wrath, 'They
will not enter into my rest.
A warning based on the example of Israel

Gospel Reading:
27 Some of the Sadducees came to him, people who deny that there is a
resurrection.
28 They asked him, 'Teacher, Moses wrote to us that if a man dies having a wife
and without a child, his brother should take the wife and raise up a posterity for his
brother.
29 There were therefore seven brothers: the first took a wife and died childless.
30 The second took her as wife,a and he [also] died childless.
31 The third took her, and likewise all seven [brothers] left no children and died.
32 Afterwards, the woman also died.
33 Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife will she be? For the seven had her
as wife.
34 Jesus replied to them, 'The children of this age get married and are given in
marriage.
35 But those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the
resurrection from the dead do not marry or are given in marriage.
36 They cannot die any more, because they are like the angels, and they are
children of God, being children of the resurrection.
37 But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the [story of the burning]
bush, when he called the Lord 'The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the
God of Jacob.

38 Now, he is not the God of the dead, but of the living, because all are alive to
him!' 39 Some of the scribes answered, 'Teacher, you speak well!' 40 Then, they
did not dare to ask him any more questions.
41 Jesus asked them, 'Why do they say that the Christ is David's son? 42 David
himself says in the book of Psalms, 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand,
43 until I make your enemies the footstool of your feet.
44 David therefore calls him Lord, so how is he his son?'

Day 19-Dec-2023 Tuesday

Fast Day/ oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Holy Martyr Boniface (290) and Aglais

He lived in Rome during the reign of Diocletian. He was slave to Aglais, the daughter of a Senator, and served as steward of her household and her large fortune. He also lived in fornication with her, and was addicted to drink. Despite these sins, he was kind, hospitable to strangers, and generous toward the needy.

In time, Aglais became troubled in her conscience over her way of life, and began to think of the account that she would have to give to God for her sins. Some Christians told her of the holy Martyrs and, moved by their accounts, she ordered Boniface to travel to Tarsus and bring back relics of these holy ones. Boniface, still deaf and blind to the things of God, said jokingly, "And will you honor me as a Saint if I bring back my own body to you as a relic?"

Boniface traveled to Tarsus with a large escort, well supplied with gold. He went straightaway to the Amphitheater, where he beheld a number of Martyrs being subjected to awful torments for the pleasure of the crowd, but bearing them all with patience and serenity. At the sight, the dissolute steward was touched by grace and felt his heart melt within him. He ran to the Martyrs, fell at their feet and kissed their chains, and loudly declared that he too was a disciple of Christ. So he too was put in chains, subjected to frightful tortures, and finally beheaded, rejoicing and praising God.

Boniface's escort, mystified by his long absence, made inquiries and were astonished to discover that their godless and sinful companion had met a Martyr's death the day before. They paid fifty pounds in gold for his body and brought it back to Rome, thus fulfilling Boniface's own unwitting prophecy.

An angel of the Lord appeared to Aglais and said, "Arise and go to meet him who was once your servant and companion in sin, but has now become our brother. Receive him as your master for, thanks to him, all your sins are to be forgiven." Rejoicing, Aglais received her former lover's holy relics and built a church in his honor, where many miracles were wrought. Aglais gave away

her fortune, devoted herself to ascesis and prayer, and was herself granted the grace to work miracles. She reposed in peace thirteen years later, assured that the sins of her past had been effaced through the intercessions of the holy Boniface.

Eutychios the Martyr of Thessaloniki
Saint Grigentius, Bishop of Safar
Venerable Elias of Murom

Day 19-Dec-2023 Tuesday

Fast Day/ oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.
Readings of the day: Hebrews 4:1-13; Luke 21:12-19
1 God's Sabbath rest Let us beware, then! Since the promise remains, let us be
careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it.
2 For we also had the Good News preached to us, just as them, but they gained
nothing from the word they heard because those who heard did not combine it with
faith.
3 However, we who have faith are entering into that rest, even as God said: As I
swore in my wrath, they will not enter into my rest.
a And yet, the works were finished from the foundation of the world.
4 Somewhere [else], God said this about the seventh day: God rested on the
seventh day from all his works.
5 And again: They will not enter into my rest.
6 It remains the case, then, that there would be some people who would enter that
rest, and those to whom the Good News was preached before failed to enter [it]
because of [their] disobedience.
7 God has thus defined a certain day, 'today,' saying through David much later, in
the words already quoted: Today if you will hear his voice, do not harden your
hearts.
8 If Joshua had given them rest, God would not have afterward spoken of another
day.
9 There must still be, then, a Sabbath rest for God's people, 10 and anyone who
has entered into his rest has also rested from his [own] works, just as God did.
11 Therefore, let us do our utmost to enter into that rest, for fear that anyone
should fall according to the same pattern of disobedience.
12 Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged
sword, piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and it
is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.
13 No creature is hidden from God's sight, but all things are naked and open
before the eyes of the one to whom we must give an account.

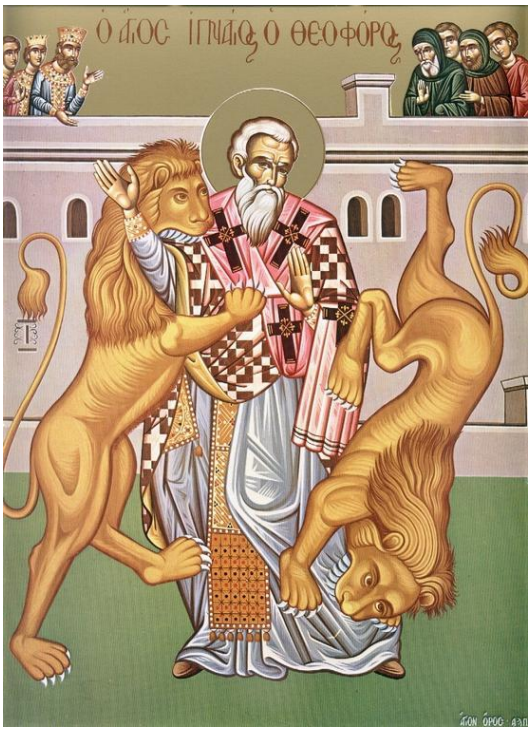
Gospel Reading:
12 But before all these things [happen], you will be placed under arrest and be
persecuted, you will be handed over to synagogues and prisons, brought before
kings and governors for my Name's sake.
13 It will turn out for you as an occasion to bear witness.

14 Therefore, settle it in your hearts not to ponder in advance how to answer, 15
for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to
withstand or contradict.
16 You will be handed over even by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends.
Some of you will be put to death.
17 You will be hated by all for my Name's sake, 18 yet not a hair of your head will
perish.
19 By your endurance you will acquire your lives.

Day 20-Dec-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Beginning of the Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ
Holy Hieromartyr Ignatius the God-bearer, Bishop of Antioch (107)



There is a tradition that it was the young boy Ignatius whom Christ took upon his knee to explain to His followers that they must become as children to enter the Kingdom. He knew the holy Apostles personally and, with St Polycarp (February 25) was a disciple of St John the Evangelist. He succeeded Evodus as second Bishop of Antioch, the capital of Syria and at that time one of the largest cities in the world. Here, during the persecutions of Domitian, he strengthened the faithful, brought many pagans to Christ, and prayed that he himself would be granted the crown of martyrdom. His flock called him the Godbearer, a title that he did not refuse, for he said that all Christians after their Baptism are truly Bearers of Christ, clothed in the Holy Spirit.

When peace was restored to the Church for awhile, the holy Bishop devoted himself to organizing the young Church on strong foundations at a time when the last of the Apostles had only recently passed away. He established the principle that the Grace imparted to the Apostles at Pentecost was handed down to the bishops appointed by them, and so on through the generations: the Apostolic Succession.

The Emperor Trajan, passing through Syria to make war in Armenia, spent some time in Antioch and initiated a persecution of Christians. Rejoicing that the time of martyrdom had at last arrived, Ignatius presented himself before the Emperor and eloquently declared his faith in Christ.

"So you are a disciple of the one crucified under Pontius Pilate?" asked the Emperor.

"I am the disciple of Him who has nailed my sin to the Cross, and has trodden the Devil and his devices underfoot."

"Why do you call yourself the Godbearer?"

"Because I carry the living Christ within me!"

"Therefore, let the bearer of the Crucified One be taken in chains to Rome,

there to be fed to the lions for the amusement of the people."

And so it was. During the long and difficult journey to Rome, cruelly mistreated by his guards, the Saint wrote a series of letters to the young churches which remain one of the treasures of the Church. In Smyrna, he was able to meet with his fellow-disciple Polycarp and entrust to him the care of the churches whose shepherd he had been. As Trajan had ordered, In Rome he was taken to the amphitheater and, as the Synaxarion says, "entered the arena as though approaching the holy altar to serve his last Liturgy in the presence of the faithful, who were crowded among pagans on the steps of the amphitheatre." In a few moments he was completely devoured by the lions, save for a few bones. These were gathered by the faithful and returned to Antioch.

In his Letter to the Romans, the holy Bishop wrote to some who wished to rescue him from his martyrdom: "I am the wheat of God, and am ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may be found to be the pure bread of God."

Repose of Our Holy Father John of Kronstadt (1908)

His main commemoration is on October 19.

Philogonius, Archbishop of Antioch

Saint Daniel, Archbishop of Serbia

Day 20-Dec-2023 Wednesday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Hebrews 5:11-6:8; Luke 21:5-7, 10-11, 20-24
11 We have many things to say about these things but it is hard to explain because you have become slow at understanding.
12 For although by this time you should be teachers, you still need to have someone teach you [even] the basic principles of God's oracles.
You have come to need milk, and not solid food!
13 Everyone who lives on milk is not experienced in the word of righteousness; such a person is a baby.
14 But solid food is for those who are fully grown, who have trained their senses to discern good and evil.
6 Therefore, going beyond the teaching of the basic principles about Christ, let us move on to perfection! Let us not lay again a foundation of repentance from dead works, of faith toward God,
2 of the teaching of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.
3 If God allows, this is what we shall do.
4 Regarding those who were once enlightened, who tasted of the heavenly gift, became partakers of the Holy Spirit,
5 tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come,
6 but then fell away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance! They crucify the Son of God for themselves all over again and expose him to shame!
7 On the other hand, the land which has absorbed the rain that comes often upon it and thus brings forth a crop suitable for those who till it; such a land receives blessing from God.
8 Yet, if it bears thorns and thistles, it is rejected, close to being cursed; and its end is to be burned.

Gospel Reading:
5 As some were talking about the temple and how it was adorned with beautiful stonework and votive offerings, Jesus said,
6 'As for these things which you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left here [standing] on another and that will not be thrown down!' 7 Then, they asked him, 'Teacher, so when will these things take place? What is the sign that these things are about to happen?' 10 Then he said to them, 'Nation will rise

against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.
11 There will be great earthquakes, famines, and plagues in various places.
There will be fearful events and great signs from heaven.
20 But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its
desolation is at hand.
21 Then, let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains! Let those who are in
the midst of her depart! Let those who are in the countryside not enter in [the city].
22 For these are days of vengeance, so that all things which are written may be
fulfilled.
23 Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who nurse infants in those days!
For there will be great distress in the land, and wrath to this people.
24 They will fall by the edge of the sword and will be taken away as captives into
all the nations.
Jerusalem will be trampled down by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are
fulfilled.

Day 21-Dec-2023 Thursday

Fast Day/ oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Holy Martyr Juliana of Nicomedia and those with her (304)

She was the daughter of a prominent family in Nicomedia during the reign of the persecutor Maximian (286-305). Her parents betrothed her to a nobleman named Eleusius, but without his knowledge, or that of her parents, she had already committed her life to Christ, and consecrated her virginity to him. To put off her suitor, she told him that she would not marry him until he became Prefect. Eleusius went to work using his fortune to bribe and influence those in power, and succeeded in being appointed Prefect of Nicomedia. When he went to Juliana to claim her as his wife, she was forced to confess herself a Christian, saying that she would never marry him unless he gave up the worship of idols and embraced the faith of Christ. For her confession, she was arrested and taken before the Prefect: Eleusius, her once-ardent suitor. He was now filled with an ardent rage toward her and, when she would not renounce her faith, had her subjected to the most sadistic tortures imaginable. Miraculously, she endured these without harm. Witnessing this wonder, 500 men and 130 women from among the pagans confessed Christ. The enraged Prefect had all of them beheaded immediately, followed by Juliana herself. She was eighteen years old when she won the Martyr's crown.

Our Holy Father Peter, Metropolitan of Moscow (1326)

"Saint Peter was born in Volhynia in 1260 and entered a monastery there at the age of thirteen. Making the Ladder of Saint John Climacus his guide in the monastic life, his obedience, meekness and willingness to undertake tasks that were repugnant to his brethren made him beloved of them all. He also painted icons and was the originator of the Muscovite style of Russian iconography. After some years, he left for the small Monastery of the Transfiguration in order to find the quiet favourable to prayer. Saint Maximus, the metropolitan of Kiev (6 Dec.) visited this monastery and was greatly edified by the virtues of Peter, whom he decided should be his successor as head of the Russian Church. He was confirmed in this resolve by an apparition of the Mother of God, and he made the request to the Patriarch of Constantinople on whom the Russian Church depended. In 1325 therefore Saint Peter was consecrated Metropolitan of Kiev, of which the see had been

transferred to Vladimir by Saint Maximus, after the sack of Kiev by the Tatars. Peter's election was confirmed by a Council, but he immediately encountered opposition from the Russian princes, who were vying with one another for influence over the leader of the Church. Peter's meekness and charity towards his enemies won him their respect; but although conciliatory in all that concerned himself personally, he was nonetheless strict as regards the faith and moral uprightness. He energetically opposed intense Muslim propaganda, and travelled throughout Russia to confirm the faith. He did not hesitate to risk his life for the sake of making peace among the princes and, foreseeing that Russia would reunite around the principality of Moscow, he transferred his Metropolitanate see to that city and began the construction of the renowned Cathedral of the Dormition in the Kremlin. He gave up his soul to God while at prayer on 21 December 1326, and many miracles of healing were wrought at his tomb." (Synaxarion)

Saint Procopius of Vyatka, Fool for Christ (1627)

"Saint Procopius, the son of devout peasants, first feigned madness to escape a marriage that was being urged on him. He spent his life in the streets half-naked, slept wherever night overtook him and would never accept the shelter of a house. He used signs to make himself understood and never spoke a word, except to his spiritual father, with whom he would converse normally as a man in possession of all his faculties. When he was given an article of clothing, he wore it for a while out of obedience and then give it away to someone poor. When he visited the sick, he set fire to the beds of those who were going to get better, and rolled up in their sheets those who were going to die. He made many predictions, often by means of disconcerting prophetic signs, whose meaning became clear with the event. He spent thirty years in foolishness for Christ and, having foretold his death, fell asleep in peace in 1627." (Synaxarion)

Holy Martyr Themistocles of Myra

Juliana, Princess of Vyazma

Day 21-Dec-2023 Thursday

Fast Day/ oil and wine are allowed. Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.
Readings of the day: Hebrews 7:1-6; Luke 21:28-33
7 This Melchizedek was king of Salem, priest of God Most High, who met Abraham
when he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and who blessed him.
2 Moreover, Abraham gave a tenth part of all to this Melchizedek! By the
interpretation of his name, he is, first, 'king of saving justice' and also king of
Salem, that is, 'king of peace;' 3 without father, mother or genealogy, having
neither beginning of days nor end of life.
He was made like the Son of God and remains a priest for all times.
4 Now, consider how great this man was, since even the Patriarch Abraham gave
him a tenth out from the best spoils! 5 Indeed, the sons of Levi who receive the
priestly office have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the
law, that is, of their brethren, although they too are Abraham's descendants.
6 But this man, who was not of the same descent, received tithes from Abraham
and blessed him who has the promises!

Gospel Reading:

28 But when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because
your redemption is near.
29 Then he told them a parable: 'Look at the fig tree and all the trees.
30 When they are already budding, you see it and know on your own that the
summer is already near.
31 Likewise, when you see these things happening, understand that the Kingdom
of God is near.
32 Amen, I tell you: this generation will not pass away until all [these] things are
accomplished.
33 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

Day 22-Dec-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs

Holy Great Martyr Anastasia the Widow, the Deliverer from Potions (290)

She was born in Rome to a wealthy and prominent family. Though her father Pretexatus was a pagan, her mother Fausta instructed her in the things of God. Her father married her against her will to Publius, a prodigal and impious man lacking in Christian or pagan virtue. Anastasia was in the custom of dressing herself as a poor working woman and going out by night to visit and comfort the many Christians in prison (this was the time of Diocletian's persecution). When Publius discovered this, he was furious that his wife was demeaning herself by consorting with the despised Christians, and had his wife locked in the house with so little food that she came close to death by starvation. She was able to get a letter to her spiritual father Chrysogonus, who was also in prison, and their correspondence helped to sustain her through her ordeal. After three months her husband died in a shipwreck and she regained her freedom. Immediately she redoubled her work for the suffering Christians and their families, devoting all her time and wealth to their comfort and care.

One day Diocletian declared that all Christians in his prisons should be slain, and his command was carried out in one night. The next day Anastasia came to visit her beloved companions and, learning that all were dead, fell sobbing by the gate, no longer caring to conceal her Christian faith from anyone. Almost immediately she was arrested and brought before the authorities, who subjected her to every form of abuse. One prefect offered to marry her if she would bow to the idols, but to have her tortured to death if she would not. When she was unmoved, he attempted to rape her, but was struck blind and died miserably. She then briefly escaped to Nicaea and found refuge with the pious St Theodota, but was seized again along with Theodota and her children. After further trials and torments Anastasia, Theodota and her children, and others who had been converted to Christ through Anastasia's example, were executed.

Saint Anastasia's relics were taken to Rome, where a church was built in her honor. The relics were later translated to Constantinople and placed in another church bearing her name, where they worked many miracles.

Because she has healed many through her prayers from the effects of poisons and potions, she is called Pharmocolytria, "Deliverer from Potions."

Holy Martyr Theodota with her three children

Day 22-Dec-2023 Friday

Strict fast; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs
Readings of the day: Hebrews 7:18-25; Luke 21:37-22:8
18 There is a cancellation of an earlier commandment on account of its weakness
and uselessness, 19 because the law made nothing perfect.
Now, there is the introduction of a better hope through which we draw near to God.
20 Moreover, our Lord was not made priest without the taking of an oath
21(although others became priests without any oath).
But with an oath, God says of him: The Lord swore and will not change his mind,
'You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.
a 22 Because of this, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.
23 Many, indeed, were made priests [in the past] because they are prevented from
continuing in office when they die.
24 But because he lives forever, Jesus holds a perpetual priesthood.
25 Therefore, he is also able to save to the very end those who draw near to God
through him, because he lives forever to make intercession for them.

Gospel Reading

37 Every day, Jesus was teaching in the temple, and every evening, he would go
out and spend the night on the mountain that is called Olive.
38 Then early in the morning, all the people came to him in the temple in order to
listen to him.
22 The plot against Jesus Now, the feast of unleavened bread, which is called the
Passover, was approaching.
2The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to do away with Jesus by
killing him, but they feared the people.
3 Then Satan entered into Judas, called Iscariot, who was numbered with the
Twelve.
4 So Judas went and talked with the chief priests and officers of the guard about
how he might deliver him to them.
5 They rejoiced and agreed to give him money.
6 Judas agreed and began to look for an opportunity to deliver him to them when
there would be no crowd.
7 Then, the day of unleavened bread came, on which the Passover must be
sacrificed.
8 So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, 'Go and prepare the Passover for us, that
we may eat [the Passover meal].

Day 23-Dec-2023 Saturday

Fast Day (Wine and Oil Allowed)

The Ten Holy Martyrs of Crete (250)

All ten suffered for Christ together on Crete during the reign of the Emperor Decius. They were tormented and humiliated for thirty days, but bore their trials with such serenity that the Governor feared that others would be converted to the Faith, so had all of them beheaded.

Our Venerable Father Paul, Archbishop of Neocaesarea (4th c.)

This holy bishop was so revered that he was summoned by the Emperor Licinius himself, who attempted to turn him from the Faith. When this failed, the Emperor ordered that molten metal be poured on the bishop's hands, which left them paralyzed and horribly disfigured. Years went by, Christianity was legalized by Constantine the Great and, when the Council of Nicaea was summoned, St Paul was among those bishops who were called to attend. Many of the bishops who attended bore in their bodies the marks of the Lord Jesus (Gal. 6:17): noses, ears or eyes lost, scars and burns from their trials for Christ. At the Council, the Emperor Constantine knelt before St Paul and kissed his hands as holy relics, saying 'I will never tire of kissing these hands which have lost their life for the sake of my Christ.' After the Council, the holy bishop served in Neocaesarea for several more years, then reposed in peace.

Our Holy Father Nahum of Ochrid, Wonderworker and Enlightener of the Slavs (~900)

He was a disciple of Saints Cyril and Methodius (May 11), and traveled with them on their missionary journey to the Slavs. With them and their other companions, he endured many trials, including several imprisonments at the hands of the Latin Franks, who were seeking to seize control of the region of Moravia in order to impose the Latin language and to spread the heresy of the filioque. For a time their troubles were relieved by Pope Hadrian II, who supported the mission and made St Methodius Archbishop of Pannonia, with jurisdiction over the Eastern European Slav lands. But when St Methodius died, St Nahum and his companions were imprisoned once more, then sent into exile, where they finally found shelter in the Orthodox Kingdom of Bulgaria. There they were able to continue their work of evangelization in the Slavonic language. Saint Nahum founded the Monastery that bears his name on the shore of Lake Ochrid. After his repose his relics were brought there for burial, and are venerated there today.

Saint Niphon the Wonderworker

Day 23-Dec-2023 Saturday

Fast Day (Wine and Oil Allowed)
Readings of the day: Galatians 3:8-12; Luke 13:18-29

Epistle Reading: St. Paul’s Letter to the Galatians 3:8-12
Brethren, the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “in you shall all the nations be blessed." So then, those who are men of faith are blessed with Abraham who had faith.
For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be every one who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them.
" Now it is evident that no man is justified before God by the law; for “the righteous shall live by faith"; but the law does not rest on faith, for “He who does them shall live by them."

Gospel Reading: Luke 13:19-29
The Lord said this parable, “The kingdom of God is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his garden; and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches."

And again he said, “To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? It is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened." He went on his way through towns and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem.
And some one said to him, “Lord, will those who are saved be few?" And he said to them, “Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.
When once the householder has risen up and shut the door, you will begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, open to us.’ He will answer you, ‘I do not know where you come from.’
Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets
.’ But he will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you come from; depart from me, all you workers of iniquity!’
There you will weep and gnash your teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves thrust out.

And men will come from east and west, and from north and south, and sit at table in the kingdom of God."

Day 24-Dec-2023 Sunday

Fast Day ; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Eve of the Nativity of Christ

A strict fast is kept today.

Holy Virgin and Martyr Eugenia and her companions (~190)

"This Martyr was the daughter of most distinguished and noble parents named Philip and Claudia. Philip, a Prefect of Rome, moved to Alexandria with his family. In Alexandria, Eugenia had the occasion to learn the Christian Faith, in particular when she encountered the Epistles of Saint Paul, the reading of which filled her with compunction and showed her clearly the vanity of the world. Secretly taking two of her servants, Protas and Hyacinth, she departed from Alexandria by night. Disguised as a man, she called herself Eugene [Eugenios -ed.] while pretending to be a eunuch, and departed with her servants and took up the monastic life in a monastery of men. Her parents mourned for her, but could not find her. After Saint Eugenia had laboured for some time in the monastic life, a certain woman named Melanthia, thinking Eugene to be a monk, conceived lust and constrained Eugenia to comply with her desire; when Eugenia refused, Melanthia slandered Eugenia to the Prefect as having done insult to her honour. Eugenia was brought before the Prefect, her own father Philip, and revealed to him both that she was innocent of the accusations, and that she was his own daughter. Through this, Philip became a Christian; he was afterwards beheaded at Alexandria. Eugenia was taken back to Rome with Protas and Hyacinth. All three of them ended their life in martyrdom in the years of Commodus, who reigned from 180 to 192." (Great Horologion)

Venerable Nicholas the Commander

Venerable Antiochus of the Pandectes

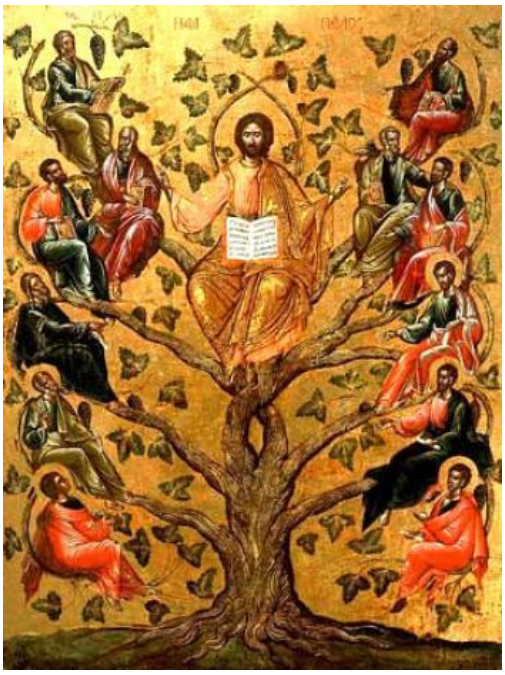
Day 24-Dec-2023 Sunday

Fast Day ; Avoid meat, dairy and eggs.

Sunday before Nativity;
Hebrews 11, 9-10; 32-40; Matthew 1, 1-25
Epistle Reading: St.
Paul's Letter to the Hebrews 11:9-10; 32-40 BRETHREN, by faith Abraham sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.
For he looked forward to the city which has foundation, whose builder and maker is God.
And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets – who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.
Women received their dead by resurrection.
Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, that they might rise again to a better life.
Others suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment.
They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were killed with the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated – of whom the world was not worthy – wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.
And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

Gospel Reading: Sunday before Nativity; Matthew 1:1-25

The book of the Genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.
Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Aram, and Aram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king.



And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asa, and Asa the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amon, and Amon the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.
And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Salathiel, and Salathiel the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.
So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.
Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way.
When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit; and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.
But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.
All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 'Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel' (which means, God with us).
When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took his wife, but knew her not until she had borne a son; and he called his name Jesus.

SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING

Today the Gospel reading includes a very unusual text for its Sunday scriptural lesson: the Holy Evangelist Matthew starts his Gospel with the genealogy of our Saviour.

Usually people listen to this prolonged list of names without particular interest: as a tribute to some historical records.
What is the meaning that the Gospel wants to convey by placing a massive number of names as a part of its crucial theological message, just before the Nativity of Christ? The divinely inspired genius of St Matthew chooses genealogy as a way of summarising the history of our salvation, as the best way to relate how our salvation became possible: to do so he shows that individual people, their personality and their spiritual condition - and not political or even religious events - are the main decisive factor in the history of mankind.
‘History is a realm of personal agency,’ a famous Russian theologian Fr Georges Florovsky writes.
Each of the persons named has somehow contributed to the birth of their off-spring - Christ the Saviour, Who is not only the Son of God, but also the Son and off-spring of human forefathers.
It is not only the perfection of His Divinity that brought Him to the Cross, but also the virtues, nourished by His human ancestors.
This spiritual lineage starts with virtues of Abraham, whose unquestionable and absolute faith and obedience, as well as his capacity for self-sacrifice, prefigured the Ultimate self-sacrifice of the God-man Christ (cf. Mk. 10:45). It further mentions Sts Isaac and Jacob, for whom the love for God and His blessing was more important than anything in the world; St David the King, known for Christ-like humility and meekness of (cf. Mt. 11:29), who prophetically lived through all the experiences of Christ (Ps. 22 passim.), the all-wise King Solomon, the 'Son of David" (cf. Mt. 12:42; 13:54), and so on.
This remarkable succession people with their individual virtues leads us to the most unexpected denouement: 'And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.' (Mt. 1:16). The biological thread seems to be broken: Joseph is not the father of Jesus, why then does the Scripture place him in the genealogy of Christ? The answer is simple: here we have a radical redefinition of the concept of 'father".
What does it mean to be a 'father"? 'Biological parenting is not yet true parenting", the Gospel seems to imply.
True fatherhood goes far beyond the biology of birth: implies the 'birth from on High" (cf. Jn. 3:5-6), where Joseph rightly deserves his place in the genealogy of Christ. He passed to the babe Jesus all the virtues, both his own and the ones of his forefathers, as a ‘spiritual DNA’: amongst these virtues is his titanic victory of faith, to believe in the unbelievable (in accepting beyond logic the innocence of Mary); his self-effacing humility, so much so that we have hardly any record of his life; his selfless ministry to not-his-own child - in giving up his own life, abandoning the rest of his family and becoming a refugee in a foreign land, Egypt.
It is from His Heavenly Father that Christ inherited His all-perfect Divinity; and it is from his earthly 'supposed" father Joseph and His Mother that Jesus, the Son of Man, inherited many virtues which later shone in all their glory upon the Cross,

where the Godman accomplished His ultimate sacrifice for our eternal salvation. This leaves all the parents with a profound question: what virtues, what spiritual «genetic material», the ‘‘spiritual DNA", can they pass to their own children? And even more so: how does each one of us contribute to the spiritual lineage of mankind, to its salvation? This message of the Gospel fills us with a sense of awesome responsibility: our conduct and, in fact, every action we take in our life can be of universal significance: it can affect the history of mankind.
Today’s message of the Gospel invites us to be engrafted in this salvific genealogy, and we pray: Let ‘the Holy Ghost come upon us’ (St John Chrysostom epiclesis) and the power of the Highest overshadow us’ so that in our life we also can ‘give birth’, as it were, to that ‘holy thing’ (cf. Lk. 1:35) as our legacy to the history of mankind.

The seed of God in Christ’s Ancestors and Descendants
This wonderful passage from the Gospel we heard today describes the genealogy of our Lord, enumerating His ancestors from Abraham until David and further till Joseph, the betrothed of the Mother of God. It is marvellous to see the history of the Lord’s ancestors according to His flesh. Abraham is the one who excelled in faith and David the man of a contrite and humble spirit, but all the Lord’s ancestors excelled in these virtues.
From the very beginning, when Adam fell from the face of God, the Lord said to Eve that her seed will crush the head of the serpent and the serpent will bruise the heel of her Son.
Already from the beginning of sacred history there is a Gospel foretelling the coming of a supernatural and paradoxical Holy Seed, ‘the Seed of the woman’, that is, of the virginal birth of the Saviour. That Holy Seed will crush satan, and the latter will bruise His heel.
This bruising of the Lord is His passion and three days’ burial by which He destroyed the death that had stricken mankind. When Prophet Isaiah despaired over Israel, God consoled him by a vision in which He said that Israel will not perish, for Israel is like the terebinth tree which, when cut down, innumerable shoots spring forth from it again.
This is because Israel bears within its righteous people a Holy Seed that constitutes its stability. All the ancestors of the Lord that excelled in virtue, bearing within themselves that seed of God and the promises that the Messiah would come forth from them at the fullness of time, received a circumcision in the flesh to seal their belonging to their heavenly Master.
After the Lord’s coming, His descendants again please Him through faith and a contrite heart, nourishing within them the incorruptible seed of His word, conforming their life and repenting in the light of His commandments. They too received a circumcision - not of the flesh, but of the heart.
It is the wound of His love, the power of regeneration to become children of God,

to be born anew, as Saint Peter says. The incorruptible seed of His word gradually builds up a tabernacle within their heart, a dwelling place for the Most High to dwell therein.

However, the righteous of the Old Testament did not yet receive the fullness of future glory. They received only ‘the earnest’, as they await us, so that, as members of the one glorious body of which Christ is the Head, we may altogether partake in the Great Supper which the Lord prepared in His Kingdom for those that loved His appearing.

This is the glorious body of our Lord mentioned by Saint Paul as the prowess of faith of all those who pleased God through faith, ‘the cloud of witnesses’ both in the Old Testament and in the New.

Let us keep alive within us the incorruptible seed of His word and bear a contrite spirit which the Lord does not despise but He bends over it with His incorruptible consolation so that we too may receive that same glory in His Kingdom.

Christ is the sign of God for all generations as Scripture says: ‘this shall be a sign unto you, the humble birth of our Lord in a manger’.

The sign of our God is humility as only the spirit of humility can bear the fullness of divine love. Christ humbled Himself to the end to manifest His perfect love for the world which saves it.

So we also, if we accept and bear the sign of the Son of man, the spirit of humility and discipleship, then surely, we will become worthy to love Him with all our heart, will all our soul and with our entire being, which is our blessed destiny unto all ages. Amen.

Archim. Zacharias, Monastery of Saint John the Baptist, Essex

Day 25-Dec-2023 Monday

Nativity, Fast Free

The Nativity according to the Flesh of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ

Matins
Gospel Reading: Matthew 1:18-25
The birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit; and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 'Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel" (which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took his wife, but knew her not until she had borne a son; and he called his name Jesus.

Epistle Reading: St. Paul’s Letter to the Galatians 4:4-7
BRETHREN, when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then also an heir of God through Christ.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 2:1-12
When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him.'
When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and

assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.
They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it is written by the prophet: ‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will govern my people Israel."
Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star appeared; and he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.'
When they had heard the king they went their way; and lo the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy; and going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

> The Synaxarion's account includes this tradition from the Protoevangelium of James: "When Joseph had found a place for Mary in Bethlehem, he went out to look for a midwife. On his way, he noticed that the whole of nature had suddenly become utterly still as though seized with astonishment: the birds hung motionless in mid-air, men and beasts stopped in their tracks, and the waters ceased flowing. The continuous movement that leads everything from birth to death and imprisons it in vanity (cf Pss. 38:6-7; 102:15. Eccles. 1) was suspended, for at that moment the Eternal entered within the heart of time. The pre-eternal God became a newborn child. Time and history now took on a new dimension."

Sermon preached by Fr. Antony Hughes for the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ on Thursday, December 24, 2015.
Listening to the hymns of the Vesperal Liturgy, the Royal Hours, and of Matins today, I was struck by some extremely beautiful things, which spoke of the openness of God towards his creation; of his love and compassion for all his creation, for the entire universe, is wrapped up in the incarnation of God in the flesh.
Here's one of the prayers we read today:
When the Lord Jesus was born of the Holy Virgin, the whole creation was lighted, even Herod was lighted, though he resisted that light and became a murderer of children. In fact, the only one in the entire Nativity story who closed his heart was Herod. And you see what happened to him: anger, fear, jealousy, bitterness, and murder comes when you close your heart. Tonight, God has opened his heart entirely and sent His only-begotten Son to save us.

How is this? How has He filled the entire universe with Himself? Because He took our common flesh. He took upon Himself the matter which makes up the universe, the matter we all share, and by which we are all brothers and sisters together, every man, woman, and child, our brother and sister.
Around the manger, all creation gathered, the heavens with the star, and the earth; the kings, the elite, and the poverty-stricken lowly shepherds; and the animals in the guise of the ox and the ass. Not only that, the church saw something even deeper than that when they chose the ox and the ass for the icons.
The ox and the ass, everyone knew, that the ox and the ass represented the Egyptian gods osiris and sept. What they were saying is that even the gods are gathered at the manger to worship the true God, the incarnate Lord, the Son of God, the Living God. The Church knew something was going on that was deeper than any of us today would ever know.

I fear that today because of the circumstances in the world, and because of other things, we are being tempted to close our hearts, to become angry and bitter and vengeful and paranoid. We must not accept this temptation.
We are Christians and Christians love all people. We love our enemies or we are not Christians. We love those who abuse us and persecute us or we are not Christians. Jesus Christ Himself on the cross kept His heart open and said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Christ never closed His heart, and we are never to close our hearts for any reason whatsoever."

We must keep ourselves in line with Him. We don't want to become like Herod. You know, when your heart closes, you can feel it. You become darkened, you become enclosed. It's a nerve-wracking feeling. You feel like the world is becoming narrower and narrower. When you feel that feeling, open your heart. Trust in God, Trust in Him Who is born tonight. Do not be afraid even of death, for He has conquered it. He has touched all of life, by sanctifying it with Himself. We have no reason to be afraid, even of death.
We rejoice tonight because He has opened His heart. Who are we to say that He can save some and not save others? That He includes some and not others? In the Scriptures, the light begins to dawn even in Samaria. The Jews did not like the Samaritans. Even in the land of Zebulon and Nepthali where the people dwelt in darkness, the pagans, the light was shining! The light is shining everywhere! Everyone who seeks Him will find Him! Everyone who loves and has compassion in their heart are already part of Him!

Let us not separate ourselves from Him. Let us worship Him and adore Him and love one another. There is one proof of Christianity according to the Holy Fathers. If we love our enemies, then we know we have made it! If we don't love our enemies, we have a lot of work to do.

Christ is born!

The Shepherds who saw the Lord

"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them. And they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." (Luke 2:8- 14)

The Veneration of the Magi

See Matthew ch. 2. According to the verses of the Feast and most of the Holy Fathers, the Magi were astrologers from Persia or Babylonia (The Scripture says only that they came "from the east.") The star which they followed was no inanimate object, but one of the Angelic Powers of heaven, appointed to lead them to the Savior. From the very beginning, the Good News of Christ was proclaimed to the nations.

Day 25-Dec-2023 Monday

Nativity, Fast Free
Readings of the day: None
Today the Apostle and Gospel of the feast are used

Day 26-Dec-2023 Tuesday

Fast Free

Synaxis of the Most Holy Theotokos.

"Yesterday, together with the Angels, the Magi and the Shepherds, we offered our worship to God made man, and born a little child for our Salvation; and today we rightly pay homage to His Mother, the All Holy Virgin Mary. The Church sets her before us in the cave beside her Son as the new Eve, the first and pre-eminent representative of the renewed human race, chosen and prepared by God throughout all generations, for the fulfilment of the Great Mystery of His Incarnation." (Synaxarion)

Here we follow the pattern of most major Feasts: on the day following feast , we honor those who also played a part in the accomplishment of God's plan.

The Flight into Egypt of the Holy Family

See Matthew ch. 2. Though St Matthew's account may leave the impression that the flight into Egypt was almost immediate, it would have been at least forty days after Christ's birth, following His Presentation in the Temple (Luke ch. 2). Christ, his holy Mother and his adoptive father St Joseph probably remained in Egypt for several years, until the death of Herod the Great.

St Nikolai Velimirovic (in the Prologue) relates the following tale: the holy family, fleeing into Egypt, were accosted by robbers, one of whom, seeing the Christ Child, was amazed at his supernatural beauty and said 'If God were to take human flesh Himself, He would not be more beautiful than this child!'. The robber told his companions to take nothing from the family. In gratitude the Mother of God told him 'This Child will reward you richly for having spared Him today.' Thirty years later it was this robber who was crucified at Christ's right hand, and was granted to hear the words 'Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise.'

Our Holy Father Euthymius the Confessor, Bishop of Sardis (840)

Bishop Euthymius was one of those assembled at the Seventh Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in 787; it was he who formulated the Council's official declaration on veneration of the holy icons. During the reign of Nicephorus I (802-811),Euthymius' enemies made false accusations against him that led to his being deposed and exiled for several years. He was called back to Constantinople by the iconoclast Emperor Leo the Armenian (813-820), who sought his support in attacking the icons; but Euthymius refused, and was exiled once more. On Leo's death, he was summoned before another iconoclast Emperor, Michael II (820-829), who in turn asked the Saint's support in his blasphemous campaign against the icons. The holy bishop not

only refused, but cried out 'Let anyone who does not worship Our Lord Jesus Christ represented in image according to His humanity, be anathema!' The enraged Emperor exiled him again (his third exile), imprisoning him in a foul dungeon at the far east of the Black Sea for three years. He was then summoned to appear before his third Emperor in succession, the iconoclast Theophilus (829-42). For holding firm in the Faith once delivered to the saints, the holy bishop was mercilessly flogged with rods, then with the sinews of oxen until his body swelled up 'like a wineskin.' He was then thrown into a dungeon where, after eight days in terrible pain, he gave up his soul to God.

The Saint's precious relics worked many miracles, and were venerated in Constantinople until the City's fall in 1453, when they were taken to Cherson in the Crimea, then to Chilea near Chalcedon. When most of the Greeks were expelled from Asia Minor in 1922, the people of Chilea brought the Saint's skull to Greece, where a church was built in his honor in Pireus; the holy relic may be venerated there today.

Our Holy Father Constantine of Synnada (7th c.)

His parents were Jews living at Synnada in Phrygia. One day when he was nine years old, he saw a Christian merchant make the sign of the Cross in the marketplace; and in imitation, without understanding its meaning, he began to make the sign. This became a habit with him, and he began to imitate other practices of the Christians around him, still without any understanding of the Christian faith. But by the power of the Cross, the grace of Christ began to grow in him secretly. He began to hear a voice within him revealing some of the mysteries of Christianity, and he began to be filled with a fervent love for the Savior.

After the death of his mother, he fled his home town to escape an arranged marriage, and came in time to a monastery in Nicaea. He told his story to the abbot, who baptized him, giving him the name of Constantine. When the sign of the Cross was made on his head at baptism, a cross appeared visibly on his forehead, where it remained for the rest of his life.

The holy Constantine devoted the rest of his days to the ascetical life, excelling in every virtue. It is said that a delighful scent would fill any place that he went, and that church doors would open spontaneously at his approach. He comforted many by healing their ailments through his prayers, and was granted the gift of discerning the secrets of hearts. After living for some time in Nicaea, he travelled to Mt Olympus in Bithynia where he lived as a hermit. Seeing that there were many Jews living in that area, he strove for a time to preach the Gospel to them, but was unable to win many of his former brethren to faith in Christ. He foretold the date of his death eight years beforehand. His final words to his disciples were 'The Lord is coming to invite me to the feast of Joy.' He then died, and a fragrant scent filled his cell. His relics gave off a healing myrrh for many years.

Venerable Evarestus

Day 26-Dec-2023 Tuesday

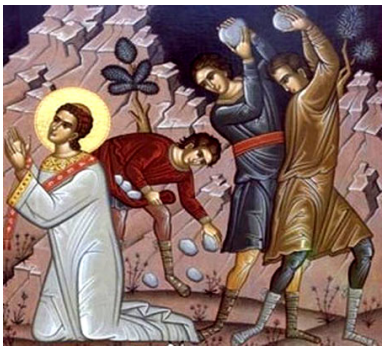
Fast Free
Readings of the day: Galatians 4:4-7; Matthew 2:1-12
Matins
Gospel Reading: Matthew 1:18-25 The birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit; and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 'Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel" (which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took his wife, but knew her not until she had borne a son; and he called his name Jesus. Epistle Reading: St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians 4:4-7 BRETHREN, when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then also an heir of God through Christ.
Gospel Reading: Matthew 2:1-12 When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him.' When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it is written by the prophet: 'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will govern my people Israel." Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star appeared; and he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.' When they had heard the king they went their way; and lo the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy; and going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and

they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way

Day 27-Dec-2023 Wednesday

Fast Free

The Holy Protomartyr Stephen the Archdeacon



Stephen was a kinsman of the Apostle Paul and one of those Jews who lived in the Hellenic provinces. Stephen was the first of the seven deacons whom the holy apostles ordained and appointed to the service of assisting the poor in Jerusalem. For this, he is called the archdeacon. By the power of his faith, Stephen worked great miracles among the people. The Jews disputed with him, but they were always defeated by his wisdom and the power of the Spirit, Who acted through him. Then some shameful Jews, accustomed to calumnies and slander, incited the people and the elders of the people against the innocent Stephen, slandering him as though he had blasphemed against God and against Moses. False witnesses were quickly found who confirmed this. Stephen then stood before the people, and all *saw his face as it had been the face of an angel* (Acts 6:15), that is, his face was illumined with the light of grace as was once the face of Moses when he spoke with God. Stephen opened his mouth and enumerated the many good works and miracles that God had performed in the past for the people of Israel, as well as the many crimes and opposition to God on the part of this people. He especially rebuked them for the killing of Christ the Lord, calling them *betrayers and murderers* (Acts 7:52). And while they gnashed their teeth, Stephen beheld and saw the heavens open and the glory of God. That which he saw, he declared to the Jews: *Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God!* (Acts 7:56). Then the malicious men took him outside the city and stoned him to death. Among his persecutors was his kinsman Saul, later the Apostle Paul. At that time, the Most-holy Theotokos, standing on a rock at a distance with St. John the Theologian, witnessed the martyrdom of this first martyr for the truth of her Son and God, and she prayed to God for Stephen. This occurred one year after the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles. Gamaliel, a prince of the Jews and a secret Christian, clandestinely took St. Stephen's body and buried it on his own estate. Thus, this first among the Christian martyrs gloriously reposed and took up his habitation in the Kingdom of Christ God.

Source: St. Nikolai Velimirovic, The Prologue of Ohrid – Volume Two.

<u>Apolytikion</u>

For the struggles you endured for Christ God, a royal diadem crowns your head, O First Champion of Martyrs. For you refuted the folly of the Jews and beheld your Savior on the right of the Father. Ever beseech Him, therefore, for our souls.

Kontakion

Yesterday the Master arrived in the flesh, today the servant departs from the flesh. Yesterday He who reigns was born. Today the servant dies for Him by stoning, the Protomartyr, the divine Stephen.

Matthew 21:33-42 Epistle Reading: Acts of the Apostles 6:8-15; 7:1-5, 47-60 In those days, Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, arose and disputed with Stephen. But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke.
Then they secretly instigated men, who said, 'We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.' And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council, and set up false witnesses who said, 'This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place, and will change the customs which Moses delivered to us.' And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.
And the high priest said, 'Is this so?' And Stephen said: 'Brethren and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, ‘Depart from your land and from your kindred and go into the land which I will show you.’ Then he departed from the land of the Chaldeans, and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living; yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot’s length, but promised to give it to him in possession and to his posterity after him, though he had no child.
'But it was Solomon who built a house for him. Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made with hands; as the prophet says, ‘Heaven is my throne, and earth my footstool. What house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things?’
'You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.'
Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth against him. But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of

God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God.' But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together upon him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him; and the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. And as they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' And he knelt down and cried with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 21:33-42 The Lord said this parable, 'There was a householder who planted a vineyard, and set a hedge around it, and dug a wine press in it, and built a tower, and let it out to tenants, and went into another country. When the season of fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants, to get his fruit; and the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first; and they did the same to them.
Afterward he sent his son to them, saying ‘They will respect my son.’ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.’
And they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?'
They said to him, 'He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.' Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures: ‘The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?"

Venerable Martyrs Theodore and Theophanes the Branded
Theodore, Archbishop of Constantinople
Venerable Luke of Triglia

Day 27-Dec-2023 Wednesday

Fast Free
Readings of the day: None
Today the Apostle and Gospel of the feast are used

Day 28-Dec-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

The Twenty Thousand Martyrs burned to death in their church in Nicomedia (~304).

During a fierce persecution by the Emperor Maximian of all who would not worship the idols, the Christians of Nicomedia were subjected to especially savage treatment. (Eusebius writes that every Christian in the city was killed.) Along with many others put to the sword or otherwise butchered there, we especially commemorate the large company who, despite all danger, gathered in the church to commemorate Christ's Nativity. The Emperor, hearing of this, sent troops to surround the building so that no-one could escape, and piled heaps of timber and brush around it. Criers then gave notice that any who wished to save their lives must come out and make sacrifice to the pagan gods.

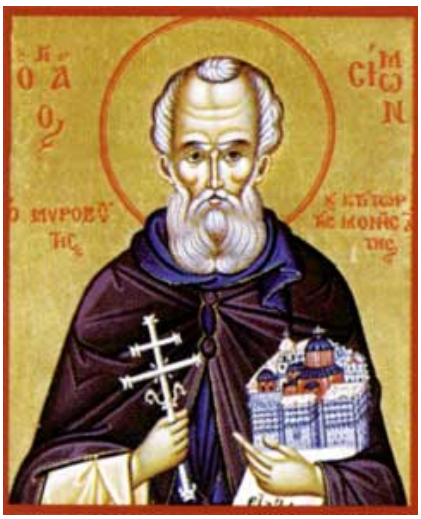
"As this announcement penetrated the church, a divine zeal, more fiery than any flame in the world, seized the deacon Agapius, who rushed to the pulpit and cried out, 'Brethren, remember how often we have praised and extolled the Three Young Men who, when they were thrown into the Babylonian furnace, called on the whole of Creation to sing the glory of God, and how the All-Creating Word then came down in bodily appearance, to assist them and to render them invulnerable by surrounding them with a moist whistling wind. The time has now come for us to imitate them. Let us offer ourselves to a temporary death for love of our Master, in order to reign everlastingly with Him!' The whole congregation with one voice then answered Maximian's criers, 'We believe in Christ God and we will give up our lives for Him!'

"As the soldiers began to set fire to the piles of wood outside, Saint Anthimus [bishop of the city, commemorated September 3] told his deacons to assemble those who were still catechumens, and he baptized and anointed them with the holy Myron. He then served the divine Liturgy, at which all present communicated in the Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Armed with divine strength and closely united in a single body by Christ who dwelt in them, the holy Martyrs felt no fear as they saw the flames leap up everywhere and thick smoke begin to fill the church. With gladness they sang in unison the Song of the Three Young Men: Bless the Lord, all works of the Lord, sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever (Dan. 3 LXX) until the last among them suffocated and gave up his soul.

"The conflagration lasted for five days. Those who then ventured into the

smouldering ruins anticipating the odour of charred flesh, found instead a heavenly scent pervading the air and the place surrounded by a brilliant light. The Saints who were glorified at this time are said to have numbered twenty thousand. Saint Anthimus himself miraculously escaped death, and so was able by his teaching to lead a large number of souls to salvation and to the new birth of holy Baptism before, in his turn, fulfilling his union with Christ by martyrdom." (Synaxarion)

Our Holy Father Simon the Outpourer of Myrrh, Founder of Simonopetra Monastery, Mt Athos (1287)



He lived during the years when Constantinople was held in captivity by the Crusaders, and the Imperial government was in exile in Nicaea. Simon fled the world at a young age and traveled to the Holy Mountain, where he submitted himself to a strict but wise Elder for many years. In time, seeking greater seclusion, he moved to a small cave on the western side of Mt Athos, near a cliff that towered a thousand feet above the sea. One night, a few days before the Feast of the Nativity, he saw a star move across the sky and come to rest above the cliff near his cave. Taking this as a demonic delusion, he ignored it; but on the Eve of Nativity, the star once again took its place above the cliff, and Simon heard a voice from heaven saying 'Be in no doubt, Simon, faithful servant of my Son! See this sign, and do not leave this spot in search of greater solitude as you have in mind, for it is here that I want you to establish your monastery, for the salvation of many souls.' Soon afterward, three young monks from wealthy Macedonian families, who had heard of the Saint's holiness, came and laid their wealth at his feet, asking that he accept them as disciples. Simon sent for builders and ordered them to construct a monastery on the very edge of the precipitous cliff. The builders at first refused, saying the work was much too dangerous; but, persuaded by a miracle worked through the Saint's prayers, they were convinced. As soon as the building was finished, the monastic community began to grow rapidly.

In his own lifetime St Simon was the source of many miracles, prophecies and healings. Once the monastery was attacked by Saracen pirates. Simon went to meet them with gifts, hoping to dissuade them from attacking. When the pirates attacked him, they were blinded, and the arm of one of them was paralyzed when he attempted to strike the Saint. All of them were healed when the holy man prayed for them, and at this wonder they all repented, received Baptism and became monks.

Saint Simon reposed in peace. A fragrant, healing balm afterwards flowed from his tomb in great quantities, so that he came to be called Myroblytis, 'Myrrh-gusher' or 'Outpourer of Myrrh.' In subsequent years, the monastery

was destroyed and rebuilt more than once, and no trace now remains of the tomb.

Holy Martyr Domna and others with her

Day 28-Dec-2023 Thursday

Fast Free

Readings of the day: Hebrews 10:35-11:7; Mark 9:10-16

35 Therefore, do not throw away your confidence which has a great reward.
36 Indeed, you need endurance in order to receive the promise after having done the will of God: In a very little while, he who comes will come and will not wait.
But the righteous will live by faith.
If he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.
39 But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who believe and so are saved.
11 1 By faith Now, faith is the personal foundation of things hoped for, certainty about things that cannot be seen.
2 By this, people of old obtained approval.
3 By faith, we understand that the universe was formed by the word of God, so that what is visible was made from what is invisible.
4 By faith, Abel offered to God a sacrifice more excellent than Cain's, and through this a testimony was given to him that he was righteous.
5 By faith, Enoch was taken away in order not to see death: he was not found because God had translated him.
He too had received a testimony that before his translation, he had been well-pleasing to God.
6 Without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever comes to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.
7 By faith, Noah, being warned about things not yet seen, was moved with godly fear.
He prepared a ship to save his household and by this means he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

Gospel Reading:

9 As they were coming down from the mountain, he told them not to tell anyone what they had seen, until after the Son of Man would have risen from the dead.
10 They kept this saying to themselves, wondering what 'rising from the dead' meant.
11 They asked him, 'Why do the scribes say that Elias (Elijah) must come first?' 12 Jesus answered, 'Indeed, Elias (Elijah) comes first and restores all things.
Why then is it written about the Son of Man that he must suffer many things and be despised? 13 But I tell you that Elias (Elijah) has [already] come, and they have

also done to him whatever they wanted to, even as it is written about him.
The healing of a possessed boy 14 Returning to the [other] disciples, Jesus saw a great crowd around them, and scribes were questioning them.
15 At once, when all the people saw him, they were greatly amazed and rushed to greet him.
16 Jesus asked the scribes, 'What are you asking them about?'

Day 29-Dec-2023 Friday

Fast Free

The Holy Infants Killed for Christ's Sake in Bethlehem

See Matthew ch. 2. Their number is sometimes put at fourteen thousand.

In our own day, the icon of "Rachel weeping for her children" (Matthew 2:18) has come to commemorate also the tens of millions of children who have died through abortion.

Commemoration of all the Christians who have died of starvation, of thirst, of cold, by the sword and by every other kind of violent death.

Our Venerable Father Marcellus, Abbot of the Monastery of the Unsleeping Ones (485)

He was born to a wealthy family in Syria at the beginning of the fifth century. Early in life he saw the futility of worldly things, gave away all of his wealth, and went to Ephesus, where he earned his living as a scribe. There he was schooled in the virtues by his fellow-worker Promotus, a slave who distributed most of his earnings to the poor; after the day's work was done, Promotus would take Marcellus to pray all night in the churches and monasteries.

Marcellus heard of the Saint Alexander the Unsleeping (February 25), who had settled near Constantinople with about thirty disciples, who made it their discipline to send up prayer and praise to God at every hour of the day and night. The monastery aroused the resentment of some more worldly monasteries, and the brethren were forced to flee to Bithynia. It was there that Marcellus joined them and took the monastic habit.

After the death of St Alexander and his successor, Marcellus was elected Abbot of the monastery against his will. Under his direction the Monastery of the Unsleeping Ones became a beacon of sanctity, with monks flocking to it from every corner of the Empire. The practice of never-ceasing service to God spread throughout the Empire, in both the West and the East. The monks were divided into three companies according to the language they spoke: Greek, Latin, or Syriac; each company took its turn celebrating the services in its particular language, and thus every hour of the day was given over to God's glory. The monastery not only grew but give birth to others: The famed Studion Monastery in Constantinople was founded by monks from Marcellus' monastery.

Saint Marcellus took part in the Council of Chalcedon, defending Orthodoxy against the Monophysite heresy both at the Council and in the years that followed. His generosity and contempt for worldly wealth were known to all: anyone who came to the monastery in need received alms, but God always

replenished the funds so that more could be given. When Marcellus inherited his family's fortune upon his brother's death, he kept none of it either for himself or even for his monastery, but distributed it to poorer communities and to the needy.

Saint Marcellus reposed in peace around 484, having lived the ascetical life for some sixty years.

Venerable Mark the Grave-digger and Theophilus the Weeper
Trophimus, Bishop of Arles
Our Righteous Father Thaddeus the Confessor
All the Christians who have died by every kind of violent death

Day 29-Dec-2023 Friday

Fast Free
Readings of the day: Hebrews 11:8, 11-16; Mark 9:33-41
8 By faith, Abraham, when he was called, obeyed and left the place which he was supposed to receive as his inheritance.
He left, not knowing where he was going.
11 By faith, even Sarah received power to conceive and she bore a child when she was past the age because she considered that the one who had promised was faithful.
12 Therefore, one man became the father to people as many as the stars of the sky and as innumerable as the sand on the sea shore, even though he was as good as dead.
13 These people all died in faith, [yet] not having received the promises.
They had seen and embraced them from afar, and they confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims upon the earth.
14 Certainly, people who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own.
15 If they had been thinking of the country they had originally left, they would have had enough time to return.
16 But in fact, they desire a better country, a heavenly one.
Therefore, God is not ashamed of them, or ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

Gospel Reading:

33 Jesus arrived in Capernaum, and when he was in the house, he asked his disciples, 'What were you arguing among yourselves on the way?' 34 However, they remained silent because on the way, they had argued with one another about who was the greatest.
35 He sat down, called the Twelve and told them, 'If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all, and the servant of all.
36 He took a little child and set him in their midst.
Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, 37 'Whoever receives such a little child in my Name, receives me; and whoever receives me, does not receive me, but the one who sent me.
38 John said to him, 'Teacher, we have seen someone who does not follow us casting out demons in your Name; and we forbade him, because he does not follow us!' 39 But Jesus said, 'Do not forbid him, for no one who does a mighty

work in my Name will be able to quickly speak evil of me.
40 Whoever is not against us is on our side! 41 Amen, I tell you that whoever will
give you a cup of water to drink in my Name, because you belong to Christ, will not
lose his reward.

Day 30-Dec-2023 Saturday

Fast Free

Holy Virgin and Martyr Anysia (298)

She was born to a pious, noble and very wealthy family in Thessalonica. When both her parents died while she was an adolescent, Anysia consecrated herself to Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom. She cast off all her jewels and fine clothing, dressing herself as a commoner. She freed all her many slaves, giving each of them a generous sum of money to establish themselves. She gave away all of her inheritance, which included large estates. Thenceforth she spent her days visiting the sick, helping widows and orphans, and, especially, aiding Christians suffering under persecution. She would visit those in prison, bringing them food and water and tending their wounds. All the time not devoted to aiding the poor or oppressed she spent in prayer in a small cell. One of her prayers was that she, like those that she helped, would be granted the crown of martyrdom.

One day, while she was walking to church, an imperial soldier accosted her and roughly questioned her. When she plainly declared herself a Christian, the soldier seized her and dragged her to a temple of the idols, where he commanded her to make sacrifice. In response, she only spat in his face. The enraged soldier drew his sword and thrust it into her side, slaying her. Some pious Christians took her body and buried it outside the city. When the persecutions had ended, a church was built in her honor at the place of her burial.

Our Holy Father Macarius, Metropolitan of Moscow and All Russia (1563)

He was born in Moscow in 1492. When his father died, his mother became a nun and he a monk, receiving the monastic name Macarius. He became an iconographer of rare talent. In 1523 he was ordained to the priesthood and made Abbot of the Monastery of Luchski; three years later he was consecrated Archbishop of Novgorod and Pskov, a see which had been vacant for many years. As Archbishop, he sent missionaries to the native peoples of the far north of Russia and, within his own diocese strove against the paganism still common among the people. He regularized life in the monasteries of his diocese, which had fallen into self-indulgence.

In 1542 he was elected Metropolitan of Moscow and head of the Russian Church. Five years later he crowned the first Tsar of Russia, Ivan Vassilievich. In 1551 he summoned the Council of the Hundred Chapters, which condemned various heresies prevalent at that time, laid down principles of Christian conduct and education, and established rules for iconography and

Church art. Throughout his time as a hierarch, he continued to paint icons, and in 1553 he brought about the production of the first books to be printed in Russian. When the Khanate of Kazan fell, he immediately sent missionaries to convert the Tatars.

When the Tsar, who revered Saint Macarius, asked him for a spiritual book, he was surprised and displeased to be given a copy of the funeral service; but the Saint told him that anyone who read this book carefully and applied its words would never sin.

Saint Macarius reposed in peace in Moscow in 1563, and his popular veneration began immediately. In 1988 he was officially glorified by the Church of Russia.

Venerable Theodora of Constantinople

Venerable New Martyr Gideon on Karakallou

Day 30-Dec-2023 Saturday

Fast Free
Readings of the day: 1 Timothy 6:11-16; Matthew 12:15-21

11 But you, man of God, flee these things! Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and gentleness. 12 Fight the good fight of faith! Hang on to the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good profession [of faith] in the sight of many witnesses.
13 Before God, who gives life to all things and before Christ Jesus, who bore witness before Pontius Pilate to this good confession, I charge you 14 to keep the commandment undefiled and blameless until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ 15 which in due time God will reveal.
To him who is the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings,a and Lord of lords, 16 alone possessing immortality and dwelling in unapproachable light; whom no one has seen, nor can see: to him be honor and eternal power. Amen.

Gospel Reading:

15 Perceiving it, Jesus withdrew from that place. Many [people] followed him and he healed them all, 16 commanding them not to reveal who he was, 17 so that what was spoken through Isaias (Isaiah) the prophet might be fulfilled: Behold, my servant whom I have chosen; my beloved in whom my soul is well pleased!
I will put my Spirit on him, He will proclaim justice to the nations, He will not quarrel or shout No one will hear his voice in the streets.
He will not break a bruised reed, He will not put out a smoking wick, until he leads justice to victory. In his Name, the nations will hope.

Day 31-Dec-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Leavetaking of Nativity.
Our Holy Mother Melania the Younger of Rome (439)

She was born in 383 in Rome, to a very wealthy family with large estates in Italy, Africa, Spain and even Britain. She was the grand- daughter of St Melania the Elder (June 8) and a pious disciple of Christ from a young age. She was married against her will at the age of fourteen, to a relative named Apinianus. They had two children, both of whom died in early childhood. Henceforth Melania and her husband dedicated themselves entirely to God. They had both dreamed of a high wall that they would have to climb before they could pass through the narrow gate that leads to life, and soon began to take measures to dispose of their wealth. This aroused opposition from some of the Senate, who were concerned that the selling off of such huge holdings would disrupt the economy of the State itself.

With the support of the Empress, though, Melania was able to free 8000 of her slaves and give each a gift of three gold pieces to begin life as freedmen. She employed agents to help fund the establishment of churches and monasteries throughout the Empire, donated many estates to the Church, and sold many more, giving the proceeds as alms. When Rome fell to the Goths under Alaric in 410, Melania and Apinianus moved to Sicily, then to Africa, where they completed the sale of their propery, donating the proceeds to monasteries and to aiding victims of the barbarians.

In Africa Melania, now aged about thirty, took up a life of the strictest asceticism: she kept a total fast on weekdays, only eating on Saturday and Sunday; she slept two hours a night, giving the rest of the night to vigil and prayer. Her days were spent in charitable works, using the remainder of her wealth to relieve the poor and benefit the Church. After seven years in Africa, Melania, her mother and her husband left on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. There they founded a monastery on the Mount of Olives, which grew to a community of ninety nuns. Melania's mother died in 431, then her husband and spiritual brother Apinianus ; she buried them side by side.

Save for one visit to Constantinople, Melania continued to live in reclusion in a small cave on the Mount of Olives; she became an advisor to the Empress Eudocia, who sought her expert counsel on her gifts to churches and monasteries.

Melania fell ill keeping the Vigil of Nativity in 439, and fell asleep in the Lord six days later; her last words were 'As it has pleased the Lord, so it has come to pass.' Her monastery was destroyed in 614 by the Persians, but her cave hermitage on the Mount of Olives is still a place of pilgrimage and veneration.

Saint Zoticus, Cherisher of the Poor and Servant of Lepers (4th c)

He was born in Rome, and as a young man was chosen by the Emperor Constantine to assist in the foundation of his new capital at Byzantium. An outbreak of leprosy in the new City became so severe that the Emperor ordered that all lepers, whatever their rank, be driven from the city or drowned in the sea. Zoticus, moved by compassion for these people, went to the Emperor and asked him for a large amount of gold to buy gems and pearls to enhance the glory of the city, 'For, as Your Majesty knows, I am well-qualified in this field.' The Saint then used the gold to ransom all those being led into exile or to drowning, and to establish for them a camp on the hill of Olivet on the opposite shore of the Bosphorus. There he brought the sick and provided for their care.

In 337 Constantius, an Arian heretic, took the throne upon the death of his father. Some of Zoticus' enemies at court, seeing an opportunity, denounced Zoticus to the new Emperor, saying that he not only held subversive views, but had misappropriated public money. When he learned of these charges, Zoticus presented himself to the Emperor, finely dressed, and offered to take Constantius to see the gems and pearls that he had bought on his behalf. When they reached the hill of Olivet, Constantius was astonished to see a company of lepers coming to greet him with lighted candles, honoring and praising him and their patron Zoticus. Then the holy Zoticus said to the Emperor, 'These are the precious stones and brilliant pearls that give luster to the crown of the heavenly Kingdom that you will inherit by their prayers. I bought them for the salvation of your soul.'

Instead of being grateful, the heartless Emperor ordered that Zoticus be tied behind wild mules and dragged until dead. The mules ran down the hill, breaking the Saint's body upon the rocks and brush. Then, of their own accord, they returned to the top of the hill, still dragging the body, and, like Balaam's ass (Numbers ch. 22), spoke and proclaimed that the Martyr must be buried on that hill. The astonished and repentant Emperor ordered the Martyr buried with honor, and commanded that a hospital for lepers be built there, staffed by the best physicians and caretakers.

Saint Zoticus is also called Orphanotrophos, 'Cherisher of Orphans,' because in later years a large orphanage was added to the leprosarium. The

orphanage included a general hospital and a home for the aged. The Saint was honored throughout Byzantine history as the patron of the orphanage.

St Theophylact, Archbishop of Ochrid (~1126)

He was born on the island of Euripos and, after being educated in Constantinople, became one of the clergy of the Great Church there. He was consecrated a bishop and sent, against his will, to Ochrid, where he shepherded the Church in Bulgaria for twenty-five years. An inspired theologian and orator, he has left many homilies and, most important, a commentary on the whole New Testament, which has been has been treasured by Orthodox Christians ever since. In his last years he moved to Thessalonica, where he reposed in peace.

Ten Virgin Martyrs of Nicomedia

Cyriacus of Bisericani and Cyriacus of Taslau

Day 31-Dec-2023 Sunday

Fast Free

Sunday after Nativity
Galatians 1:11-19; Matthew 2:13-23
Epistle Reading: St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians 1:11-19
Brethren, I would have you know that the gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.
For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it;
and I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me,
in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me,
but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned to Damascus.
Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 2:13-23

When the wise men departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.
' And he rose and took the child and his mother by night, and departed to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, 'Out of Egypt have I called my son.'

Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, was in a furious rage, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time which he had ascertained from the wise men.
Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:
'A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they were no more.' But when

Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, 'Rise, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead.

' And he rose and took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaos reigned over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee.
And he went and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, 'He shall be called a Nazarene.'
SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING

Today's Gospel reading appears far from festal. We hear how the coming of the Saviour was accompanied by a horrific slaughter of children in Bethlehem.
Yet we incorporate even this reading in our Christmas joyous celebration. This is in itself is a strong message. With the coming of Christ and with the dawn of eternity and everlasting life, the world was transformed dramatically.
Evil, even in its ugliest and strongest form, can no longer prevail over good, and this is the eternal victory that Christ has brought with His coming. Death, however horrific it may be, is no longer an end, but the beginning: it is from this perspective that we are able to rejoice for the innocents slaughtered by Herod. Their story prefigures Christ's victory that is not temporal, but eternal.

From a point of view of eternal life these innocents were privileged to suffer for Christ's sake: they are the youngest martyrs ever known to the history of Christianity. They prefigure the martyrdom of Christ and set the tone of the whole journey for us Christians: " Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12).
Just as with those children, from the very first days of His life Christ suffered unending persecution, His life was under a constant threat that continued until the very end of His ministry when He was finally nailed to the Cross.
Yet the end of this journey is the beginning of eternal glory and universal authority: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth". (Mat. 28:16).
Through earthly humiliations – to heavenly glory, through weakness in the face of

human authorities – to almighty divine power, through universal rejection – to God's Kingdom of love: 'This is the lot of those of our kin (i.e. Christians), – St Theophan writes. Those who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus have their paradise not here, on earth, but there in heaven.
The Earth gives them nothing but deprivations, afflictions and persecutions. It is because Christians are led by principles that are different to those who rule the earth and live for the Earth and want to have their paradise here on Earth. These two kinds of people cannot live in harmony: the earthly people, as masters of this world, persecute those 'strangers' who look for the heavenly Kingdom. But the goodness of God turns all these afflictions into everlasting good, so that we can call with confidence and courage: "Glory to God for everything" (see: St Theophan the Recluse's commentary on 2 Tim 3:16).

Christ and His Gospel have transformed our vision of reality, of human history, of human values. This new has started with the story of children. In a remarkable way it prefigures Christ's resurrection and with Him the resurrection of all of us.
The slaughter of the children allows us to look at the tragedy of death from a new perspective. Yes, this story is a part of our Christmas celebration as we sense profoundly that with the coming of Christ "the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 15:26).
This story at the outset of the Gospel points to the end of the Gospel, which the faithful celebrate with the words: "Christ is risen from the dead, by death He has overcome death and to them in the graves has He given life".

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